

Lars Jørund Langøien

## “Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Unfolding practice, changing realities and awareness of the embodied self in Ashtanga yoga

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, June 2013

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU



**NTNU – Trondheim**  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology

**NTNU**

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU

© Lars Jørund Langøien

ISBN 978-82-471-4439-8 (printed ver.)

ISBN 978-82-471-4440-4 (electronic ver.)

ISSN 1503-8181

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2013:165

Printed by NTNU-trykk

---

## “Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

*- Unfolding practice, changing realities and awareness of  
the embodied self in Ashtanga yoga*

---

Practice: it is said that where there is no effort there is no benefit. Strength, stamina and sweat are unique aspects of this traditional Yoga, seemingly contrary to western perception of Yoga. This demanding practice requires considerable effort to purify the nervous system. The mind then becomes lucid, clear and precise: and according to Śri K. Pattabhi Jois “Wherever you look you will see God”. Only through practice will we realize the truth of what our Guru often says.

“Everything is God” (Miele 2007: 3)

The brain is only a part of the body of a Human being, and a brain without a body cannot work. The Human being is only a part of the Environment, and a Human being without an environment cannot exist. The environment is all that exists on earth, in the solar system and in the Universe. The development of a Human being is only possible if there is a set of other Human beings, the whole is the Humanity, with Human societies. (Dubois 2010: 244)



## Preface

This PhD. project has been a long and arduous journey that started with me being totally exhausted, and actually thinking I might die when I tried yoga for the first time at the students' sports centre in Trondheim, in 2004. I felt overwhelmed as we went through the sun salutations, but throughout the class something must have happened because I continued going to the classes and finished the course. And as the exhaustion receded as the number of classes increased, I started noticing not just how my body felt, but also how the teacher and fellow yoga students were talking about body, the practice and themselves. The seed of this thesis was born there.

First, I would like to thank all my yoga teachers (in more or less chronological order). So, Ingvild, Marianne, Hilde, Tatiana, Elin, Nille, Michael, David, Inga, Sharath, Saraswathi, Alex, Kajsa, Astrid, Matt, Brett, Eddie, Lucia and Tiffany. I appreciate all adjustments, help, instructions, hints, insights, encouragement and guidance you have given me in my practice.

Also, I would like to offer big thanks to all my fellow students, both in anthropology and yoga. Without you, this project would have been (even more) lonesome! In both endeavours, it has been a pleasure to have your companionship.

I especially want to show my gratitude to all the yoga practitioners I met in Mysore and elsewhere, as you have not only been fellow students, but you also have been gracious enough to share your thoughts and insights with me. Without you, this project would not have been possible.

Much appreciation also goes to all my colleagues at NTNU, especially all the PhD fellows. Although I have been living and writing in Oslo the last couple of years, you have, in many different ways, been inspirational and have given feedback on my work.

Living in Oslo, the Museum of Cultural History (KHM) has been kind enough to lend me a desk at the library. Without this workspace, I would have had to work at home, and I am pretty sure madness would have been lurking rather close. So, thanks to all

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

of you for including me at seminars and accepting me as a fellow anthropologist. And a big thanks to the librarians, Frøydis and Berit-Sonja, for all the help.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. philos. Stein E. Johansen, for, on the one hand, supporting my ideas, and, on the other hand, encouraging and challenging me to think beyond the usually trodden paths of anthropological thought. This has made the work with my thesis more interesting.

I also need to thank my family and my friends who have been partial in making me who I am.

Most of all, I want to thank my field assistant, reviewer, confidante, batman, muse, warden and wife, Elin. Thank you for kicking me in the butt when necessary, but also for all your encouragement and just believing that I could do this when I have been uncertain.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of our friend Thomasine.

Lars Jørn Langøien  
Oslo, December 2012

## Table of Contents

Preface.....	III
<b>Part one: Laying the foundations .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>1: Introduction: “Pay attention – Listen to your heart!” .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introducing the field.....	3
The subject matter: What is yoga today? .....	7
The main elements of a yoga practice .....	14
Situating the argument .....	18
Structure.....	22
<b>2: Living and experiencing the reality of “the others”: Methodological observations and theoretical implications.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2.1 Embodying experience and knowledge: Theoretical foundations.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Altering “systems” .....	38
Methodological implications .....	39
<b>2.2 Yoga and changing worlds.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2.3 Doing interviews in Mysore.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3: Yoga: Western History and the Practice .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.1 “Modernity” .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>3.2 A brief History of Western yoga practice .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>3.3 Is yoga “authentic”? .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>3.4 The practice .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Part two: Practicing yoga .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>4: The social life of the Ashtanga community in Mysore, India.....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>4.1 Being in India, being in Mysore .....</b>	<b>80</b>
Any given day.....	81
<b>4.2 Social life in Mysore.....</b>	<b>86</b>
Landmarks.....	87
<b>4.3 Pride and prejudice: The Mysore social scene .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>4.4 The Ashtanga family: “Putting people in context.” .....</b>	<b>94</b>
The two shalas .....	101
Family values.....	103
<b>4.5 Ashtanga and KPJAYI related to other yoga and shalas .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>4.6 Yoga in the Shala in Mysore.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>4.7 “Striving for excellence together”, or “the yoga police” and establishing yoga elites .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>5: My sore body: Yoga and the enactment of body in Mysore yoga .....</b>	<b>133</b>
The Body in yoga practice: Reconnections, awareness and unfolding meaning ....	135
Injuries .....	151
Disciplining the body, and the mind.....	157
<b>5.1 Different practices, different bodies?.....</b>	<b>167</b>
The dangers of mastering the body .....	175
<b>5.2 Aesthetification and the body in social settings .....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>6: Yoga as an agent of change and the requirements of a yogi.....</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>6.1 Change.....</b>	<b>185</b>
“There’s so much more to yoga than the physical practice.” .....	187
Finding the truth of world and self: The end of suffering .....	188
When and where does the change start? .....	198
The paradox of love and detachment .....	205
<b>6.2 Awareness and consciousness.....</b>	<b>208</b>

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Mindfulness, absentmindedness, and minding your own business .....	208
<b>6.3 Yogis and Bhogis: Negotiating and unfolding core principles of being a yogi</b> .....	<b>220</b>
<b>6.4 Shared practice and a fellowship of sufferers: The interchange between experience and social norms</b> .....	<b>230</b>
<b>Part three: Yoga practice, worldly matters and otherworldly issues</b> .....	<b>237</b>
<b>7: Health and fitness: The body of modernity</b> .....	<b>239</b>
The lived experience of body, health and healing .....	242
Who is likely to seek cure in yoga? .....	249
Yoga in a lifestyle tuned to health and body.....	253
<b>8: The spiritual body: Gods, gurus and guidance</b> .....	<b>263</b>
Gurus and Guidance .....	265
Surrendering .....	266
<b>8.1 Gods, spirituality and “embodied enlightenment”?</b> .....	<b>269</b>
The beliefs of aspiring yogis .....	272
The spirituality of modern-day yoga practice and yoga as a religion.....	285
<b>8.2 Individuality, spirituality and personal growth</b> .....	<b>299</b>
Yoga as a spiritual experience and the possibility of changing through personal development.....	304
The spiritual body in yoga .....	306
<b>9: Yoga, authenticity and interchange</b> .....	<b>311</b>
<b>9.1 What yoga is and should be according to its disciples: The roots, truths and authenticity of yoga</b> .....	<b>312</b>
<b>9.2 Yoga in and as a culture of consumption: Consuming the authentic?</b> .....	<b>330</b>
Yoga’s economic appeal: What it tells and why it sells .....	334
The life style industries and the commodification of yoga.....	338
Yoga© and the market: The retail price .....	341
<b>9.3 Yoga, “money and the morality of exchange”</b> .....	<b>345</b>
Paradoxes of ascetic rebellion .....	359
<b>Part four: Reconnections</b> .....	<b>363</b>
<b>10: “Enjoying the mongrel” or the topology of (yoga) practice</b> .....	<b>365</b>
<b>11: Epilogue: “This isn’t touchy-feely yoga. This is Ashtanga.”</b> .....	<b>383</b>
<b>12: Literature</b> .....	<b>387</b>
<b>Appendixes</b> .....	<b>427</b>



”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## **Part one: Laying the foundations**

... in order to discover oneness and totality, the scientist has to create the new overall structures of ideas which are needed to express the harmony and beauty that can be found in nature. Likewise, he has to create the sensitive instrument which aid perception and thus make possible both the testing of new ideas for their truth or falsity, and the disclosure of new and unexpected kinds of facts. (Bohm 2004: 3)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## 1: Introduction: “Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”<sup>1</sup>

Of one thing I am almost certain: I have never been quite as fit as I was when I returned from my first fieldwork in Mysore in September 2009. I had been doing research on yoga students at the Shri K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute (KPJAYI). Although I had managed to injure my knees by being a bit too eager to get deeper into certain poses, my months in India had otherwise treated my body very well indeed. Eight months of almost daily practice, each lasting about an hour and a half, is bound to make some physical changes.

Today, yoga is a transnational phenomenon, and in most cities worldwide, a variety of yoga classes are available. Yoga is lauded, as a practice, for its stress-relieving effects, and, as an exercise, for shaping and slimming the body, easing aches and pains, being therapeutic for both physical and mental ailments and for fostering concentration, just to mention a few things. As such, there are probably as many yoga practices, and reasons for doing yoga, as there are practitioners. Despite these variations, one often encounters some common themes when talking to practitioners. Central among these are notions of change, empowerment, discovery or reconnection with one’s body and getting in touch with oneself. When I first started practicing, which I did because it seemed like a well-rounded exercise for the whole body while also fostering “concentration”, conversations circling topics like these were what first attracted me to do research on yoga and yoga practitioners. Yoga, in the West and elsewhere, is a part of a vast complex of ideas and practices concerning self-empowerment, healing and change, and, as such, embraces such topics as consumption, trends, fitness and food, as much as, religion, spirituality and enlightenment. I will look into how yoga, as a physical practice (and a philosophy), unfolds through personal practice and social discourse. I will also try to untangle how this practice might be partial in changing the practitioners’ outlooks on and understandings of life, his or her body and him- or herself. Changes in bodily dispositions can, and to some degree *will*, change how the self and the world are seen,

---

<sup>1</sup> Encouragement from Eddie Stern during his talk at Puro Yoga on May 14, 2012.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

experienced, and interpreted, and thus alter the life-world of the one going through these changes.

Having done fieldwork among Ashtanga yoga practitioners in Mysore, India, I in this thesis want to explore how the personal experience of a physical practice can influence a globally distributed practice and worldview, while such personal experiences are also socially modulated and gain significance from global discourses. The personal practice of Ashtanga yoga, does not unfold in a vacuum. I will explore the interchanges between individual experience and globally distributed communities of practice, and how yoga as a practice unfolds and is embodied. Yoga is a personal practice, but it is also a social one. As the students in Mysore unfold their practice, knowledge is *created*, and their realities are altered. Change can, for some students, be gradual and partial, while for others, it can be abrupt and total. In either case, transformation is a major trait that is associated with yoga practice, and I will explore how this comes about.

I will argue that the city of Mysore, India and KPJAYI, in particular, can be interpreted as nodes (Glaeser 2006) where friction (Tsing 2005) occurs. These are sites for exchange of knowledge and experience, and also sites where knowledge and experience are developed, challenged and transformed. Mysore, and especially the Shala<sup>2</sup>, is where the yoga community congregates, or rather, it is where yoga practitioners go to commit even deeper to a practice that is already central in their lives. This is where the ties are truly tied. The Ashtanga community is a community of practice – though the practice is lauded as personal and individual, the *common* Ashtanga practice is the reason for coming together. Without this practice, there would be no gathering of people. The yoga students, and the teachers among them, are interpreted as apprentices (Lave 1991; Marchand 2008) of different levels of mastery, and what they are going through at their home studios and in Mysore is a form of situated learning (Lave 1991). Through their participation in practice, and their ongoing learning, their identities as yoga students unfold and are shaped.

---

<sup>2</sup> A shala is a yoga school or place where yoga is practiced. In this text, “the Shala”, with a capital S denotes the shala of KPJAYI. This, or “the Institute”, is how its students usually refer to KPJAYI.

This text will make a sketch of the elements that converge during the unfolding of a personal yoga practice. I will delve into the situated body and examine what takes place within. I will also look outwards to the worldwide adoption or appropriation of what is traditionally an Indian practice, and look at how the “global” debates on yoga influence individual practices. Additionally, I will look at more situated social interaction. As such, my main focus is on the individual yoga practitioner, and the unfolding of his or her practice, and not on the tradition of “Yoga”, its history or anything similar to it. The tradition of yoga and its history have to be a part of the story, however, because the individual’s perception of each of these aspects, as well as health, religion, etc., have an impact on the experience of yoga. Thus, this thesis embraces a wide variety of topics, each of which are worthy of their own research project. Therefore, some of the topics are regrettably addressed in a rather shallow manner. Instead, I have emphasized those things that the practitioners themselves emphasized – though I have also tried to look beyond their words.

In rounding up the argument, I will look into what implications it might have for anthropology as a practice. Appropriating practice, be it yoga or anthropology, constructs and alters the meaning of knowledge. As scholars, it seems that we sometimes forget that in describing and explaining “the others”, we are also always, to some degree, describing and explaining ourselves (as human beings). If this were not the case, the anthropological endeavour would be void. Any anthropological interpretation points to some panhuman tendency – including the researcher – without which it wouldn’t really be anthropology. Thus, in the extension of my exposition on yoga practice, this thesis will be a contribution to the anthropology *of* practice in general, which will extend to an argument about the anthropology *as* practice.

### Introducing the field

My findings are based on my own yoga practice and participation in the social life of the Mysore yoga community, as well as the stories of several people who came to Mysore to practice yoga between January and September 2009 and in February 2011. Additionally, I will base my thesis on talks I have had with yoga practitioners in Norway, and on statements collected from Internet blogs and other online debates about yoga as a practice. The popular imagery of yoga presented in the media and

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

elsewhere is also a part of the public presentation of yoga, and is thus involved in shaping people’s general idea of yoga.

In capturing yoga as an agent of change, there are several aspects that need to be analysed. First of all, there are one’s initial motivations for doing yoga practice. The attraction of yoga must be sought in the various beneficial effects the practice is perceived to give, and thus, there is a need to look into broader tendencies of Western society. Broad historical trends in the West have been denominated with terms such as “modernity” and “postmodernity” and have been characterized by high hopes and subsequent disillusionment among the masses of the people. The fragmentation of Western society has led people to question the inherited truths of religion and ideology, or so the story goes.

Before venturing into these topics, an important question has to be posed: What *is* yoga? De Michelis (2005) and others partly following her traces the history of yoga and the origins of what she calls “modern postural yoga” (MPY), a category to which she assigns most popular/modern yoga practices. These yoga forms are characterized by the focus on the physical practice of *asanas*, or postures. In trying to trace the history of the modern practice of ‘yoga’, De Michelis (2005, 2007, 2008), and writers like Singleton and Byrne (e.g., 2008), not only seek to establish the (eventual) authenticity and historical correctness of what today is denoted ‘yoga’, they are also normatively establishing what can and should be labelled yoga. Research into MPY is partial in creating the “object” MPY “out there” in the world, and in establishing it as an entity that can, and therefore should, be seen. We as researchers are creating the boundaries and making the categories. This is apparent in Singleton (2005, 2008, 2010), De Michelis (2005, 2007, 2008), Liberman (2008) and others, as their accounts tend to normatively establish what yoga *is* and what can be counted as (authentic) yoga. Put bluntly, we are saying: “*This* is yoga, and this is *not* yoga”. Though we usually claim this is not our goal, we are trying to establish a single, static entity by erecting historical lines, and in our attempts at distilling the essence of ‘yoga’, we tend to forget those who practice and teach. There is a parallel here to the long debate on ‘ethnicity’ where it has been argued that ‘ethnicity’ is just an arbitrary tag that humans have used to categorise each other. Banks (1996) argues that ethnicity is a category that is established by us – the researchers. The primordialists who argued

that ethnicity is innate, in Banks' (1996) interpretation, claim that 'ethnicity' is in the hearts of people, while the instrumentalists claim that it is "used" by people, which means that it exists only in peoples' heads. Banks (1996), on the other hand, says that ethnicity exists in the researcher's head, but that it has "escaped from the lab". Levine (1999), in his argument against Banks (1996), says that 'ethnicity' is a term and something that is "out there", which moves people and groups of people to act in extraordinary ways, and thus we cannot really claim that it does not exist. Rather than existing in the researcher's head, 'ethnicity' exists in everybody's head. Levine (1999) states that it is our task to study its manifestations.

My inroad in this thesis is similar to Levin's (1999). Rather than trying to establish the truth or falsity of modern yoga by comparing it to some idea of its ancient original form and development, I want to study the manifestations of this thing "called" yoga as it appears today among those who adhere to its practice. Mainly, my starting point is the practice of Ashtanga yoga, which De Michelis (2005) categorizes as MPY, but, as will become clear, "to have a yoga practice" entails much more for "my" practitioners than just the morning practice of postures. I want to study the manifestations and development of personal practices within the style of Ashtanga yoga, the creative unfolding of yoga as a *living* practice and the construction of knowledge that takes place among the students. My claim, as previously mentioned, is that yoga is perceived as an agent of change and transition.

It ought to be noted, though, that 'yoga' as a category and term, to some degree and in certain ways, is contested also as an *emic* term and category *within* the yoga community, and this complicates matters further. 'Ethnicity' is sometimes an *emic category*, without being an *emic term*. As such, 'ethnicity' as an *ethic* term and category in certain settings is easier to handle as it is simpler to keep the researchers' categories separated from those of the researched. 'Yoga' on the other hand is an *emic* category that is complex. Even between the "cultural actors" of the yoga community there are discrepancies about what constitutes 'yoga'. Yoga is poly-vocal, multiple, and what the term 'yoga' denotes depends on the context. It is commonly agreed that 'yoga' is good, but how and why it is good, and what it is, is contested and debated, which becomes apparent at certain junctions in the practice and when different ideals meet. Much of this thesis evolves around yoga students' debates on what yoga *is*, and

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

how they come to and alter their understanding of it. Thus, the disagreements on what ‘yoga’ ought to contain are to some degree placed *within* and at the borders of the yoga community. As such, the debates are also formative for that community. Independent of what the contents of ‘yoga’ are, it is a social force.

Instead of trying to fill the category ‘yoga’ with a distinct content at this point, it might be more fruitful to consider ‘yoga’ as the possession of the yoga community. Social groups are distinguished by the “estates” around which they form “corporations” (Radcliffe-Brown 1952). In Radcliffe-Brown’s (1952) sense, ‘yoga’ can be interpreted as the (abstract or virtual) “estate” around which the yoga community forms a “corporation”. The continuity of the yoga corporation is dependent on the continuity of its estate – yoga. There is, on the one hand, continuity of possession of the practice, and, on the other, there is continuity in the fact that the community transcends single members because even though some withdraw from the practice, new people are constantly being recruited. The estate, and thus being part of the corporation, implies certain (in the case of yoga, negotiable) duties and rights, which are altered by a deepened committed to the estate that is yoga. As such, the corporation can be said to claim certain rights over its members (if they are to be considered proper members) – i.e., they have to conform to certain standards drawn up by the corporation. A difference from a kinship-based corporation is that the members *choose* to become a part of yoga as a corporation, and thus the degree of reversibility and possibility of withdrawal is larger. In the case of yoga, the corporation is not about “Blut und Boden” (as “corporations” and “estate” in Radcliffe-Brown’s (1952) interpretation are mainly tied to kinship and territory); it is primarily about emotions, ideas and conceptions. As we will see, however, the yoga students in my material have strong commitments to their estate, and some frame this commitment in a sense of inevitability. The yoga estate – the conceptions and ideas of yoga – in these cases become comprehensive and extensive. In furthering this argument, it seems reasonable to argue that this is the case in general. Corporations are primarily about comprehensive, all-embracing thoughts, ideas and conceptions, and thus the estates they gather around gain strength from what I later term ‘religion’ or ‘religious’, i.e., that which has an “all-encompassing significance”.



The yoga community is the most important keeper and communicator of the truths of yoga, though there are several subgroups congregated around different styles of practice. It could be said that the estate has been partitioned. Even within different styles, there might be varying ideas of the practice and degrees of commitment, as I will show. These communities present the premises of the practice, making newcomers aware – through example and word – of what conduct is applauded and what is found to be appalling. In “Empowerment and Using the Body in Modern Postural Yoga”, which is his contribution to “Yoga in the Modern World” (Singleton and Byrne 2008), Nevrin (2008) writes about the “social strength” of the yoga community. Newcomers are socialized into the community, so even though the practice is individual and personal, yoga is also a social phenomenon and a social practice. The transference of values takes place everywhere yoga is practiced, but becomes even more apparent in, for instance, Mysore where the practitioners are away from their everyday lives and are living in a more secluded environment.

Although these yoga practitioners might be said to constitute a rather specialized and particularly motivated group of practitioners in the European and American, as well as Asian, yoga communities, this research can give new insight into what yoga has become for a Western audience. As a physical practice, yoga has become an important part of the movement of body consciousness and fitness that has been seen in recent years. The lean and healthy body is an object of adoration and a product to be sold and bought, both in advertising other products and as a product in itself, such as exercise or other products that claim to ensure one will acquire “the perfect body”. Yoga is also a spiritual practice claiming to hold answers to most of our daily troubles. On the more individual level, there is the impact on the practitioners themselves. Many practitioners readily testify to changes both in body and mind.

### **The subject matter: What is yoga today?**

Yoga. Yoga is a way, it's a tool of ... finding yourself. Finding the God. Finding the connection. For me yoga is a ... it's a practice, and it's a tool. And tool for happiness. Total happiness. (Sonja)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Ashtanga yoga, or Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, as it is sometimes called, as taught by Pattabhi Jois of Mysore, India, takes its name from Patañjali’s “Ashtanga Yoga” as presented in his “Yoga Sutras” (Patañjali 2007), which was composed sometime between 100 BCE and 500 CE (Flood 1996). Ashtanga means eight-fold or eight-limbed, and it describes the eight stages to *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is the cessation of the attention to the body and it

... is a condition of pure awareness in which the self has become completely detached from its entanglement with matter. It is a state beyond worldly or sensory experience, in which consciousness is absorbed in itself without an object, or is reflexive, having itself as its own object. (Flood 1996: 98)

India and its “cultural and spiritual-religious traditions” have fascinated and held Europeans and Americans spellbound for eons. Many have sought and found answers to the mysteries of life in the Vedas and other texts. India has been presented as innately spiritual whereas the West is secularized. India is authentic. The notions of innate spirituality have lent themselves to yoga as well and can be seen together in the idea that yoga is a holistic workout; body, mind *and* spirit get their due. Yoga represents sets of knowledge as well as practices, or you might say it represents practical knowledge, as well as a vast philosophical tradition. According to tradition, the source and core of this knowledge is India. From there, it has travelled throughout the world, both through Indians taking it with them on their journeys and through people going to India, many of whom have travelled there to gain insight into the yoga tradition. (Feuerstein 2001)

Theoretically, and in the eyes of many practitioners, the postures (*asanas*) represent only a minor part of yoga or rather the path to yoga. The word ‘yoga’ means “union”, or “to yoke”. So it alludes to a notion of connectivity and of making things whole. What it is a union between varies. One level is the union of body and mind or body or soul, depending on your viewpoint. At the ultimate level, it is said to connote the union of the individual mind or soul, with the super-soul, God, Spirit, Being, everything or the immersion (or perhaps dilution) of the self in the universe. Yoga, in this sense, also means the path or quest for this kind of extinction. Secondly, yoga is

the name of one of the six major schools of Indian philosophy, of which the foremost teacher was Patañjali, a semi-mythical figure, entity or even deity, often depicted as the divine serpent, Ananta. Patañjali preached an eight-limbed (ashtanga) path on the road to *kaivalya*, or liberation. *Kaivalya* has, in more recent times, often been combined with *samadhi*, which has come to denote enlightenment (that is, the yoking of the self with the divine). The eight limbs are: 1. *Yama* (which consists of *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (not stealing, cheating or being envious), *brahmacharya* (retaining vitality or sexual fluids, abstinence or continence) and *aparigraha* (moderation)); 2. *Niyama* (containing *shauca* (internal and external cleanliness, or clean body and clean thoughts), *santosa* (contentment), *tapas* (discipline of body and sense organs), *svadhyaya* (prayer) and *ishvarapranidhana* (surrendering to God)); 3. *Asana* (the physical postures); 4. *Pranayama* (breath control); 5. *Pratyahara* (withdrawal of the senses); 6. *Dharana* (fixing the mind on one point); 7. *Dhyana* (meditation); and, finally, 8. *Samadhi* (absorption). This path is described in the main scripture of Patañjali, “The Yoga Sutras”<sup>3</sup>, often called the “yoga bible”. In the “Sutras”, it is stated in Chapter One, verse two: “yogaschittavrittinirodhah”, or yoga is “chitta vritti nirodhah”, which means “yoga is the ability to direct the mind exclusively toward an object and sustain that direction without any distraction” (Desikachar 1995: 149). Of the eight limbs, the third, *asanas*, or postures, is the most important at the moment, because in talking about “yoga”, people are often referring to the *asanas*.

Yoga is typically seen both as the tool and the product, or both the path and the goal, as Paula, a South American yoga teacher in her forties, says:

What I see as yoga is the ... how do I say ... ? Is anytime, any moment that you enter pure awareness. And when you enter pure awareness ... I mean, yoga is the possibility to be that fully. So any gaps you get there, and entry you get there is like the doorway towards yoga. And yoga is kind of designing and helping and giving you tools. So the funny thing that I see yoga as the tool, and as the all...the path let's say. But yoga as also that which is it. Pure awareness. Pure consciousness. So there is an aspect in yoga, which you can see as the path,

---

<sup>3</sup> There are a myriad of different translations and commentaries of the “Yoga Sutras”. For a translation and commentary of Swami Vivekananda, see Patañjali (2007): “Sacred Texts: The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali – The Essential Yoga Texts for Spiritual Enlightenment” (Translation and Introduction by Swami Vivekananda), Watkins Publishing; London. On the eighth limbs, see e.g., Desikachar (1995), Jois (2002) or Räisänen (2005). I will come back to some of these limbs in Chapter 6.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

as the instrument, but it’s also what is yoga itself, is the pure consciousness. You understand?

For Paula, then, yoga is mainly about awareness. The *asana* is only the entrance or the first step. Though I have written that yoga means union, there are other interpretations. According to Eddie Stern,<sup>4</sup> another way of understanding yoga is as desireless action, ‘yoga’ here means not just the *asana* practice, but it also means the wider aspects of the practice. As such, yoga can equally mean “disunion”, i.e., the disunion or separation from suffering. Equanimity of mind/will or freedom from sorrow is tied to taking action without having attachments to the results. Instead of being preoccupied with eventual results, we need to listen and be aware of what is actually going on at present. A desireless action is doing an action because it has to be done, not doing it to achieve and chase after some specified or wanted goal. This is also true for the *asana* part of the yoga practice. If we are chasing after the achievement of a certain *asana*, striving for more postures, or finishing the primary or the intermediate series, we enter the realm of infinite creativity, according to Stern, and once we are there it will never stop. There will always be the next thing. Just doing it because it has to be done will still have an effect on some part of our being, but we will not be caught up in chasing infinite goals. Instead, we want contentment (*santosha*), which is non-striving.

During his talks, Eddie Stern, pointed out several times that he does not really know what yoga is. He is just expounding upon his experience of his own practice, and urges us to practice without great expectations, but rather with awareness. “Pay attention and listen to your heart,” he says. Self-observation is an important notion. Yoga, as such, is a practice, but also an experiment, and an inquiry into one’s own being. Yoga has to be *created* in our own practice. If it is not practiced with awareness, breath, *dristi* and devotion, the *asana* practice would just be gymnastics.

When I later write “yoga” in this thesis, I am referring to the above “constructions” unless otherwise specified. Modern Yoga is a collection of different *yogas*, as Singleton and Byrne (2008) write:

---

<sup>4</sup> This was a part of two talks he held at Puroyoga Oslo on May 13th and 14th, 2012. Eddie Stern is a long-time student of Pattabhi Jois and a certified teacher. He is very well known in Ashtanga circles. He also translated Pattabhi Jois’ (2002) “Yoga Mala” into English.

To consider yoga in the modern world as primarily *divergence from* is to oversimplify the vectors of continuity and rupture within Indian yoga traditions themselves and to project an impression that they exist somehow outside of history. Such polarization of traditional and contemporary yoga (and their connotations of “real” and “less real”), therefore fails both to recognize the heterogeneous, manifold, and changing nature of the former and to do justice to the real continuities that obtain in the latter.

Furthermore, do we not have an obligation to consider yoga’s modern manifestations in and of themselves, rather than solely in negative contrast to real Indian yoga traditions? (Singleton and Byrne 2008: 5)

Thus, Singleton and Byrne (2008) see divergence and continuity both in premodern and modern day *yogas*. Both are manifold *and* changing. As they urge, I set out to consider one of yoga’s modern manifestations in itself, and those who adhere to this practice. The question of “real” or “less real” thus becomes less important, although these dividing lines are made relevant by the practitioners themselves in their expositions on their practice.

The idea of yoga’s ancient roots is important to many practitioners, and the debate about the veracity of the practice’s claim of uninterrupted lineage and authenticity of the “modern” schools is prevalent both inside the community and among scholars of yoga. In my eyes, the task of the anthropologist is not to establish the truth or falsity of these claims, or any faiths, but rather to look into its significance in and impact on peoples’ lives; that is, our task is not to proclaim, “God is dead!” or “Witches, as the Zande believe in them, clearly do not exist,”<sup>5</sup> nor to spread the Gospel and shout from the mountain, “He has risen!” These are theological dealings. That being said, we should be honest in our sympathies and antipathies, both towards ourselves and to our audience, as our personal stand might have an impact on our understanding and presentation of cultures. My stand is that these are “true” practices because they are having a real impact on the lives of the practitioners. They are lived realities, notwithstanding my understanding of their “really real” convergence with some “true reality” out there. This approach deals with how people *create* their realities, and it implies that there ought to be some belief in the people we study, and that their

---

<sup>5</sup> Though it ought to be remarked that Evans-Pritchard (1976), a Catholic of faith, was ahead of his time in admitting the social reality of faith, and was, as such, fairly neutral as to the reality of the witches. Socially, it worked. He also consulted the Zande oracles.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

realities are treated as realities. Invented traditions and created pasts (Keesing 1989) are real – they are lived realities. Creation and change is the “natural” state of culture and tradition, though we tend to perceive them as more or less static. What anthropologists, sociologists, those studying the science of religion and other “experts” choose to call it, and into which categories we decide to put yoga, is a matter of *our* choice, reflects *our* understanding of the world in general and doesn’t really determine how the practitioners experience the practice. The important aspect of yoga and yoga practice, and Ashtanga yoga practice in particular, in this context, is the meaning it has for the individual practitioner. The individual practitioner’s perception of and motivation for doing the practice is my main focus in this text. In particular, I am interested in what changes that the people who are practicing perceive and create in their own lives, being and body. And just to be perfectly clear: I do think yoga can be beneficial in several ways.

Though examining the importance of the practice for the individual practitioner is my main focus, the “truth” of yoga as practice cannot be entirely done away with. Anthropologically, what is held to be true and authentic is the central notion, but the “really” true has an impact on what is *held* to be true. If it could be proved beyond doubt that yoga as a practice is either a hoax or actually what many “believers” claim it is, an ancient discipline of healing and eventual salvation, this would probably have a tremendous impact on yoga’s standing as a practice and philosophy. As such, the degree to which what is true and can be verified affects individuals and cultures, and what form this influence takes, says something about the people who hold these truths. The debates on the authenticity and the beneficial and/or injurious effects of yoga are illustrative of such matters. It is hard to assess the “really real truth” of “yoga” as a phenomenon, and also of the benefits of the practice. This is partly because the term ‘yoga’ is polyvocal, and its “contents” are contested. In regards to the anthropological endeavour, the anthropologist’s comprehension of the truth claims of his informants might have a huge impact on the analysis, whether he believes or rejects them (e.g., Fyhn 2001; Narby 1998). Anthropologically, much can be said of a phenomenon and the group of people holding it as true, without trying to evaluate the *actual* truth of this phenomenon. *More* can be said, though, if the researcher can assess with high probability the actual reality of the phenomenon. Where the truth of a

practice, belief or phenomenon is hard to assess, the only option is, to the best that one can, to be honest about it, as well as about one's own uncertainty.

Claims of authenticity or inauthenticity of their own practice, or the yoga practice of others, are in themselves interesting as these claims might say something about yoga's position in the lives of the practitioners, as well as something about their motivations for practicing. "Authentic" in such statements are also at least twofold. One aspect refers to an ancient unbroken tradition, whereas another refers to something "real", which might be a revival, rediscovery or a creation of something that is "more real" or "better". It can denote both that this is the *original* form and that this is the style that actually *works*. Often, but not necessarily, such claims converge. I am going to look into the practitioners' perceptions of authenticity, not trace the history of yoga. Tracing *the* history of yoga would also be challenging since:

The very breadth of the word's semantic field should give us pause to examine the agendas which attach to the term *yoga* in all its plurality, both in popular and scholastic discourses. Indeed, it might be helpful to think more generally of *yogas*, with a multiplicity of definitions and interpretations, rather than of a single *yoga* that we would seek to define and circumscribe. (Singleton & Byrne 2008: 5)

Singleton (2008) explores how the "Yoga Sutras" of Patañjali were established (historically) and reinterpreted (intentionally) to become perhaps the most central text in modern yogas. He argues that the modern day importance of this text belies its traditional position, and the fact that the teachings of Patañjali (who today is seen as *the* Great Sage of yoga) for a long time lay dormant and were not a living practice. Its position today is due to the effort of translators and philosophers (both Indian and Western) who took to the text and their interpretations of the teachings within it. The idea that the centrality of the "Yoga Sutras" today might be a misrepresentation of its premodern position within yoga and the Hindu teaching, and the fact that the great revival has also brought changes in interpretation, meaning and emphasis of the "message" and has landed Patañjali as somewhat the (mythical) founder of yoga, is important to keep in mind. On the other hand, such appropriation and "relocation" of text and personage is not that uncommon – it happens in most "belief" and knowledge systems to a lesser or greater degree. The Bible, for instance, is forever being

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

reinterpreted in every day and age (even when translators and researchers are trying to discern the *real* meaning of words and phrases), and it is used as an authority on various topics. Additionally, it does not really challenge the importance of the text for today’s practitioners. The Aphorisms of Patañjali might have had a marginal role at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but today (through the effort and motivations of various actors) it is seen as *the* authority on the Ashtanga philosophy, which, to a large degree, is the (intellectual) foundation of most Modern Yogas. Although the historical development of both the modern practice and its philosophical and intellectual foundation is of great importance in order to understand how yoga has evolved into different kinds of yogas and the position these have in our own age, this minute recording of its transformations, ruptures and continuities is not vital when trying to discern what yoga and the practice thereof entails to individuals and groups of people. Even practices “without (a) *true* history” can have huge impacts on the life trajectories of those who undertake these practices (although *ideas* of authenticity, historical importance, etc. can and will have an influence on who undertakes these practices and why). In general, there is a tendency to try to separate the true, pure and (often written) ideal tradition from the more messy, on-the-ground practice thereof.

### **The main elements of a yoga practice**

Several elements are central in making up an Ashtanga yoga practice. Schematically presented, the three, perhaps, most important building blocks are the practitioner, the physical practice, and the philosophy or knowledge of the practice. Without these three, there would be no Ashtanga yoga practice. The philosophical foundation is important to justify and to make sense of the practice. On a very basic level, the philosophy contains the terminology that often arouses an interest in the practice in the first place, and which is also partial in making the experience of the practice significant. The philosophy often comes to play a more important role in the practice, as the practitioners’ commitment and understanding deepens. “The practice” embraces both the physical practice of *asanas*, and the practice of the other limbs of Ashtanga. The practice, and particularly the *asana* practice, is where the practitioner gains an (embodied) understanding of yoga, both as practice and philosophy. The practitioners are important because without them, there would be no yoga practice. There would be no yoga without anybody embodying and manifesting it. In addition



to these three elements, there is the body, the yoga community, and the teachers, or gurus, of yoga. Again, I want to underline that these are analytical categories sketched to give some structure to the elements of yoga as practice. All of these aspects of the yoga practice are inherently connected, and the first and second triangle are interconnected and enfolded in and through each other. The body mediates “between” the practitioner and the *asana* practice. Without body, no *asanas*, and the practice as such, are embodied. The teachers help to make sense of the philosophy in relation to the *asana* practice, and the yoga community is important in making sense of yoga knowledge as applicable in life in general. It is worth noting here that the categories of “yoga community” and “yoga teachers”, to a large degree, are overlapping. The yoga community is, to some degree, a hierarchical community, but these structures are dynamic and depends on the situation, as will be made clear. In Mysore, for instance, a lot of teachers “become” students and everybody practices in the same room under the guidance of the same teachers.<sup>6</sup> The yoga community is a transnational community and it consists of several subgroups. The Ashtanga community is one such group, and, as we will see, there are subdivisions within it. Some of these divisions are based on different interpretations of what are the main elements of this thing called “yoga”. The focus throughout my thesis will be on the yoga community, the yoga body and the “global debate” on yoga in the context of “modern society”. By this, I will illustrate how the philosophy is debated and can be altered, but also how it is a meaningful context for the practice, and vice versa. These features will enable me to make an argument about the unfolding of yoga as a practice that is both personal and social. My main interest is, as such, how yoga practice evolves and deepens in the interchange between the different aspects of the practice.

The spheres of yoga practice that I will focus on more or less represent, respectively, the body, the (Ashtanga) yoga community and, finally, the wider societal interest in yoga, health, spirituality and basically anything that can be related to yoga practice in general. In a slightly different wording, these represent “personal experience”, “social practice and discourse”<sup>7</sup> and “transnational debate”. As analytical levels, they cannot necessarily be easily separated in “reality”. The delimitations between these spheres are hard to pinpoint, and the two last spheres are especially hard to separate. Ashtanga

---

<sup>6</sup> This structure and presentation is inspired by Follo’s (2008) mediating triangle.

<sup>7</sup> “Discourse” here denotes “only” social debate and interchange.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

yoga practice is usually thought of as a physical and personal practice of *asana*. But it is also thought of as a practice of various rules and norms concerning such things as diet, cleanliness and ways of thinking and behaving, which are important in the teaching of the system. These ramifications of the practice, as well as the execution of the postures themselves, are informed by teachers and the community of Ashtanga practitioners, and what it takes to be a yogi is a much-debated topic everywhere yoga is practiced. As personal experiences influence the viewpoints expressed in these dialogues, the social exchanges inform the practice. The transnational debate partly represents an outside view of the practice, which is something that the Ashtanga practitioners identify partly with and partly against.

The physical, bodily experience of yoga practice is the foundation of the practice, though these experiences are highly influenced by socially transmitted ideas of what a yoga practice constitutes. The physical experience is partly tied to changes that the practitioners themselves perceive. This sphere of the practice deals with motivations for practicing and transformations traced to yoga practice. In teaching yoga, much weight is placed on the personal experience of the teacher. Yoga can, as such, be seen as the skillful manipulation of one’s own and others’ bodies.

On the “discursive” level, yoga is a social practice. Not only is it a personal practice centred on the private experience of *asanas*, “doing yoga” is influenced by and is meaningful within the environment in which the practice is undertaken and done. The practice is a dialog between different experiences. As the body is both biological and individual, and also social, yoga, as such, is both a highly individual, and even selfish, practice and a social practice. There is a constant exchange of experience and expertise, both among students and from teachers to students. Yoga is learning by doing, listening to self, and experimenting with one’s own body, but it is also asking others for help, getting pointers on how to execute a posture, or just being adjusted in a pose. There are constant internal debates of “good practice”. The experienced and advanced students (and teachers) can be seen as possessors and “bestowers” of knowledge, and the Mysore social scene is arena, setting and environment for yoga practice.

As for the transnational level, or what can be called a more critical focus, there is both the “global” environment, in which the (Ashtanga) yoga community finds itself, and internal critical voices with which to be reckoned. Yoga practitioners, themselves, are uncritical of neither the practice nor other practitioners, and this adds to the debate on how yoga ought to be practiced. Whether it is the cost of practicing, the money involved in yoga, the priorities of other students or the way yoga is taught, there are dividing lines within the Ashtanga yoga community. The environment in which yoga is practiced also embraces “modern society”, as such.

“The body” remains closest to an experienced based focus on yoga. “The social scene” is of a more discursive nature and focuses on yoga as a social practice, where “yoga” – the personal practice – is embedded within a social universe and is collectively evolved as well as personally experienced. The view on yoga as a worldwide trend questions both the ideas of authenticity and change in yoga, as it is transferred from its Indian origins to most urban settings the world over. Personal embodied experience is, to a large degree, influenced by the environment that the practice is undertaken in, and under the discursive regimes in which this practice is debated. The social environment is coloured by the personal experience of the practice, as is the “global debate” on yoga as a philosophy, a practice and/or a religious discipline. The practice is never undertaken in a vacuum. It is always influenced by what is occurring around us, both in the immediate vicinity and the world. This is illustrated by the fact that the Ashtanga yoga system has its origin in Mysore, India, and has evolved under the influence of Western and Indian practitioners alike. Debates on authenticity, origin and relative wholesomeness of yoga practice (e.g., AYNY 2012; Broad 2012a, 2012b; Keil 2012; Nanda 2011a, 2011b; Venkataraman 2011a, 2011b) are influenced by experience of practice and in turn influence the practice of their “audiences” – social media also allows “everybody” to participate in these debates. New ideas that are born from these “international” debates might have a huge impact on the experience of the practice, and the ideas that are born from the practice might feed back into the debates.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

### Situating the argument

Presenting Alter’s (2008) contribution to the anthology, “Yoga in the Modern World”, Singleton and Byrne (2008) write that sensitivity to performative aspects of modern yoga can avoid binaries such as emic/ethic and practitioner/scholar, and continue: “That is to say, the concept of performativity can provide a way out of the impasse of historical or philosophical inaccuracies often inherent in “emic” truth statements about the nature of yoga” (2008: 9).

Alter sees the “...performativity as a self-conscious form of embodied discourse...” (2008: 38), and he writes that the goal of the *shivir* (“function”) is to constitute yoga through “reiterative performances...” (2008: 39). In the same anthology, Nevrin (2008) argues that the practitioners’ experience of yoga practice is in a close and complex relationship with the body and with the environment in which yoga is performed. And that...

This confluence of factors means that modern yoga is practiced and interpreted in a variety of particular discursive frameworks, even though their effect on people’s embodied experience is generally unacknowledged by the practitioners themselves. Yet it is precisely the social and existential empowerment resulting from the practice of yoga that Nevrin believes to be central to the vast popularity of yoga in the modern world. (Singleton & Byrne 2008: 10)

I am not as quick as Nevrin (2008) to judge whether the practitioners themselves are aware of the “particular discursive frameworks” of their embodied experience, but my impression is that most aspiring yogis are well aware of the changes in their body and practice that might occur when practicing in Mysore compared to practicing at home. The environment is important both to the body and to the experience of practicing yoga. As for empowerment and change, this is an actual argument for taking up yoga for many of my informants.

My argument will revolve around the following: Each practitioner’s experience on the mat (and in life) is weighed and evaluated against the transmitted truths of what the practice should be and feel like, and the students adjust the practice in relation to their *own* interpretations of the messages they receive. As practices and knowledge are embodied, the body and the whole human being changes, and these changes are continuous as unfolding experience. As humans we are embodied beings, and our

experience of the world is “dependent” on our experience of our bodies, and vice versa. Bodily patterns, habitual behaviour or world-views are thus, interdependent and a change in one of these factors can change the whole matrix.

“A yoga practice” does not just evolve through personal experimentation, deepened self-knowledge and the expansion of personal experience. These aspects are vital, but they are always shaped in a dialog with outside influences. A yoga practice unfolds through interchanges between personal experience, social discourse and a gradual transnational debate on yoga as both practice and philosophy. The individual practitioners reflect upon their *asana* practice, and the idea of yoga in general against such backdrops. Inside the yoga community, there is a hierarchy – or rather several hierarchies – where some people, such as experienced teachers and advanced students, have more authority in defining the “correct” practice than others. These people are partly defining the ramifications of the more “low-ranking” practitioners, since they are closer to the “sources” of knowledge. They are further up the lineage (*parampara*) of teachers and gurus, they have a deeper personal and embodied experience (of the truths of yoga) and they might have a firmer grasp of central yoga texts in which they can root their authority by reference. Whether or not their insights are more in line with the “original” (intentions) of the teachings can of course be debated, but that does not really matter because they have established themselves as the bearers of and have defined the (current) truth of yoga practice.

“Unfolding” is a term from David Bohm (1995) and refers to his transcendence of the Western dualism of body and soul, or the physical and the mental.<sup>8</sup> The “physical” and the “mental” are, in Bohm’s terms, analytical tools only, and these aspects are in “reality” deeply interdependent and ingrained in our being. Unfolding happens in processes of soma-signification. A deed is done, there is feedback on that action, which means that it is made sense of and then this significance is somatised, or embodied. That the action is made sense of – that it gains some meaning – implies that it comes to some end or conclusion. Once somatised, there can be a new action, the circle repeats and the whole unfolds. Though much is focused on “intentionality”, Piaget’s ideas, which Bohm (1995) refers to, are, to some degree, parallel here. Every

---

<sup>8</sup> This is only a preliminary exposition of Bohm’s theory. For a more in-depth application, see Chapter 5.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

action has an intention – i.e., there is always some reason for doing something – and all actions have a reaction. Even if “nothing happens” that is a reaction. Once the reaction is fed back into the system, intentions, and thus, actions, can be adjusted to better reach the intended goal. Once the goal is reached, new goals will appear. Though they might appear that way, these processes are not linear as numerous “unfoldings” can happen at several levels simultaneously, and they all have an impact on both each other and the whole being. Each part contains the whole, and any change in any part effects that whole.

Gregory Bateson is famously quoted for stating that information is “a difference which makes a difference” (2000d). When something makes sense, or is meaningful, this is information, or something that makes a difference. If the difference is great enough, there can be fundamental change. This change can, of course, happen over time when several differences are added up. At one point, the differences cannot be harmonized to simply adjust to “what used to be” – but rather, the whole is radically changed. This can, for instance, be a way of explaining paradigmatic changes (Kuhn 1996), and there is also a parallel here to Wallace’s (1979) revitalisation movements.

This ontology resonates rather deeply with certain phenomenological contributions in anthropology – and has both theoretical and “eventually” methodological implications (as these aspects really cannot be separated in anthropological<sup>9</sup> work, which I will get back to in Chapter 2 on methodological concerns).

In interpreting the Ashtanga yoga community in Mysore as a “community of practice” (Lave 1991; Marchand 2008), and a place for situated learning (ibid.), I will explore how Ashtanga as a personal practice unfolds (Bohm 1995) in the interchanges between the physical experience of doing *asanas*, the feedback from the surrounding yoga community, as well as societal and global discourses on health and self, that is: Ashtanga yoga as practice, phenomenon and idea takes shape and is manifested and embodied in individual practices in interchanges between body or bodily movement, personal reflection, social example and discourse and global critique. Thus, yoga manifests as practice in individual practices and in unique combinations of past and

---

<sup>9</sup> And probably not in any other human “scientific” endeavour for that matter, although *that* debate is a bit too big for this thesis.

present experience as well as surroundings. The self-reflection and sense-making can be made possible by double-description (Bateson 2000) and comparison. Yoga practice, as an introspective activity, can, by such means, be an important agent in the processes of change and transformation, both by allowing the practitioner to “know him- or herself” and by employing a vocabulary of change, transformation and spiritual growth. Through practicing yoga, and not only *asana*, such perspectives and ways of being are embodied, lived and thus, enacted (Mol 2002). For the committed practitioner, yoga can be an encompassing life (-style), and can be interpreted as a social field that frames all other aspects of her life. Yoga practitioners can enact different bodies as well as life-worlds. I will argue that these perspectives are potentially potent in this day and age when body, health and fitness have become integrated in the (late-) modern project of becoming one’s true authentic self. In gaining almost “all-encompassing significance”, yoga as practice can approach being something similar to “a religion” in certain traditional interpretations of the term, though many yoga students struggle to make sense of notions of “religion” and “spirituality”.

I will additionally claim that the insights that are gained from the anthropological study of yoga can have implications for anthropology as a discipline. Anthropology as a discipline is necessarily governed by the same limitations and possibilities of the human body/being as other human endeavours. I will argue that we need to take the consequences of our own contributions to understanding human ways seriously. As such this thesis will be a contribution to the understanding of “practice” in general.

In trying to describe and understand something in its entirety, there are many avenues that must be explored. It has been challenging throughout this project to think through all the relevant thoughts. As some of the theories I have grappled with – such as phenomenology and Bohm’s (1995, 2002, 2011) and Riegler’s (2007) theories – have very far reaching implications, it has been challenging to embrace the consequences that these have at all levels of my thesis and my work. Pursuing such consequences has made me recreate my thesis several times, and I have worked hard to keep it from fragmenting into a myriad of topics, all pointing in different directions. Although I am quite sure of the compatibility of the theories I have used, and that they are indeed fruitful for the topic, on quite a few occasions it has been hard to not get carried away

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

in the pursuit of a certain idea, and to stick to “yoga” as the gathering “thing”.<sup>10</sup> Many of the points I have focused on could have been unfolded into individual theses, as could have a few of the footnotes, if I had pursued the arguments to their logical end. The result is that some topics might be spelled out in too much detail, while others could have deserved more space. Some points might come to a rather abrupt stop, and some points might seem a bit off topic, while other, perhaps obvious, points are left slightly implicit. All in all, I hope and think that the unfolding of yoga as a practice has been given the limelight it deserves, and that others will pursue some of the paths that I have only hinted at.

### Structure

First of all, I will discuss some practical matters. I have included quite a few quotations in this text, which might seem strange when I am trying to understand practice. One reason why I have done this is to give life to the text. Another reason is that these yoga students are rather vocal, and I want to let *their* voices be heard. Also, talk and discourse are social practices. As Wuthnow writes: “...talk is an important way in which humans act, interact, and organize themselves” (Wuthnow 2011: 1). Further, this empirical examination of talk increases “...our understanding of both the micro and macro processes involved in the construction of social life” (ibid.). In Mysore, experiences on the mat are often made sense of in conversation with other students. Conversation serves as a reflection upon one’s own practice. Talking about one’s own practice, yoga philosophy and related issues are ways of reflecting upon these issues, and thus, in itself, a way of practicing, and thus, experiencing yoga.

At the start of every interview, I assured each person that I would anonymise everybody in the thesis. Although most said that they did not really find this necessary, I have anonymised and changed the names of all the informants throughout this text. Some individuals have also been divided into two persons when that division has not interrupted the relevance of their actions and statements. I have kept the names of teachers, where the quoted utterances are public statements.

---

<sup>10</sup> On the gathering quality of “things” see Fyhn (2011).



The quotations have mostly been left as they were uttered because I want to illustrate the thought processes behind the statements. However, I have omitted some hesitations, “stutterings” and “retakes” and corrected some minor mistakes where they have not altered the contents and general mood of the utterance or conversation. I did not want to make someone sound more or less sure of themselves than they actually seemed. Searching for words and how to pronounce something is illustrative of thought processes and inner negotiation of signification. Things that I have added for clarity are placed in brackets [], while *larger* omissions – sentences and paragraphs – are marked by parentheses (...).

Paragraphs written in *italics* are meant to function as illustrations, creating atmosphere, personal reflections and introspections.

Some footnotes are just a number with twelve digits. This number denotes where in my notes I can find the said entry. The digits denote the hour, minute, day, month and year of entry thus: hhmddmmyyyy.

Finally, this is not a practice manual.

In the following chapter, I will turn to some of the methodological and theoretical foundations of the thesis. This will entail presenting how the research that underlies this text has been conducted, but more importantly, it also includes a brief debate on anthropological methods in general. In short, my argument will be that most of the theoretical insights we reach in anthropological research must have an impact on how we view our methodology. And vice versa, we need to acknowledge that our theoretical and methodological inclination has a major impact on what data, and also what *kind* of data, we are able to assemble through our fieldworks. The “filters” with which we – as anthropologists – enter the “world out there” are as influenced by cultural notions and embodied experiences as the filters of the people we study. We are products of our own lived lives. If we close our eyes to this fact, we are insincere. As I am influenced by phenomenologically-oriented anthropological theory and methodology, the methodological musings in Chapter 2 also have important implications for the rest of the text, and at the end of the thesis, I will enfold the argument into more general observations of human practice.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Chapter 3 briefly looks at the issue of the state of modernity that is presented as problematic and, as such, serves as a breeding ground for anxiety and existential angst, as well as the issue of authenticity related to yoga today. I will also sketch out some of the ramifications of the practice. This chapter presents some of the general societal ramifications within which modern day yoga has to be understood.

From Chapter 4 and onwards I will unfold yoga as a personal practice, gradually starting with the body and subsequently adding layers of significance and relevance. I will, as such, try to show how the practice of yoga can come to enfold more parts of the practitioners’ lives, and how the practitioners come to look way beyond the mat when they take an account of what yoga is, can and should be.

In Chapter 4, I will turn to Mysore and the social setting where the yoga practice takes place. This is the *context* in which the practice takes place, although there is also a larger “global context” which will be more pronounced in Chapters 7 through 9. Apart from the practitioners’ own reflections upon their practice, the day-to-day social interactions surrounding the practice are the most immediate feedback that the yoga students have on their practice. This community of yoga practitioners is made up of fellow students and the teachers, and these people can act as mirrors or yardsticks which one can measure oneself against, and they are mediating between individual practitioners and the practice on one hand, and the philosophy on the other.

Chapter 5 takes an inward turn towards and into the body and the more physical experience of the practice. The feedback from the students’ surroundings is somatised or incorporated. In making sense of the experience on the mat, and incorporating this significance, the practice can evolve and unfold. Importantly, changes in the practice can also be foundational for “more existential” transformations in and of a yoga student’s life. Breaking habitual patterns of movement and behaviour, or changing how we think about these patterns, can influence and change our whole being. We are embodied beings, and changing the body can alter our life-worlds.

In Chapter 6, I expound upon the interchange between social and physical/embodied aspects of the practice and turn to the wider aspects of it. We habitually think of yoga

as the physical execution of certain postures, but a “yoga practice” consists of more than this – especially for the more dedicated practitioners. In this chapter, I will look at what it takes to be a “yogi”. This includes “moral” rules, dietary prescriptions and general rules of conduct, just to mention a few things. Importantly, this is a dynamic framework and much time is dedicated to discussing and interpreting the implications of the different notions of what it takes to be a true yogi. The interpretations that are held to be true and relevant at any given time is very much dependent on personal experience.

Chapter 7 is, in short, dedicated to the body that is situated in a modern debate on exercise and health, and situates yoga as physical practice in a larger societal context.

Chapter 8 deals with yoga as a practice that is related to questions concerning spirituality, religion and God. Is yoga a religion, and if so, how is this connected to exercising? Though yoga students themselves are hesitant to attribute “religious” connotations to their yoga practice, they grapple with this term as well as with notions of God and spirituality. I will argue that in a certain sense, yoga can be viewed as a “religious practice” when it becomes significant and gains *importance* in most conditions of a practitioner’s life.

Debates and discussions on what is the correct method of yoga stretch way beyond the immediate social circle of each individual practitioner. This will also be the theme of Chapter 9. Here I will turn to some larger issues concerning the development of yoga in this day and age. Are changes in yoga practice desirable, and if so, which changes are acceptable? What is yoga today, and what should it be? Much of these questions are related to money, and yoga in relation to capitalistic ideas of the modern world. The fear is that yoga might become subsumed in economic spheres that are governed by money. These are all questions that, to some degree, link into the question of what it is to practice yoga, what a yogi is and what yoga practices are made up of. These debates also influence the sense that each practitioner makes of his or her practice.

In the penultimate chapter – Chapter 10 – I will tie the argument together and show how yoga practices are shaped in the interchanges between personal experiences,

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

social interchanges and global debates, before looking at what this entails for our understanding of practice in general (including anthropological practice). My main argument is that a yoga practice is meaningful for the dedicated practitioner, and can be a source for fundamental personal change and empowerment, whether or not the yoga practiced today is “authentic” and received from an unbroken line of teachers. What matters is what the practice means to the aspiring yogi. Chapter 11 contains a brief epilogue.

In short, throughout this thesis, I will go through several enfoldings and unfoldings, and by the end, you will hopefully have reached a higher level of understanding of practice.

## 2: Living and experiencing the reality of “the others”: Methodological observations and theoretical implications

Of equal if not greater interest is the *jñāna-mārga*, and here we stand before a closed door. Here we are concerned with an internal process, indeed with an inner way of life, which can scarcely be understood unless we ourselves learn the way and are willing to follow it.<sup>11</sup> (Pott 1966: 3)

Pott (1966) claims that the only way to understand the path of knowledge – the *jñāna-mārga* – is to follow it, and Nevrin (2008) argues that there is a close relationship between the practitioners’ body, environment and the total experience of the yoga practice. If we take this to heart, it would include the scholar who himself practices yoga, and I would also go on to argue that this relationship between knowledge, body, environment of practice and experience of practice is prevalent in any practice. This knowledge is something that the anthropologist in the field can draw upon, and it is somewhat at the roots of phenomenology in anthropology. My intention in doing this research on international yoga students in Mysore, and writing this text, was to draw extensively on my own experience of the Ashtanga yoga practice in order to more fully convey what the practice entails, how it unfolds and how it might foster change of body and mind.<sup>12</sup>

Because of these considerations, some frustration has been gained throughout this project. Most of this frustration is tied to my attempt at writing down my thoughts and ideas concerning the experience of the practice. The problem of vividly writing down my personal experience and also of conveying the experience of others is partly rooted in my wish to present a phenomenologically inclined interpretation of the yoga travellers. As phenomenology in anthropology implies both a theoretical and

---

<sup>11</sup> *Jñāna-mārga* is the path of knowledge (Pott 1966). *Jñāna* means knowledge (Flood 1996; Jacobsen 2012), while *mārga* denotes path. According to Pott (1966), all yogis practice *jñāna-mārga* as an aspect of their practice. To what degree depends on the level of initiation and the system that is practiced. *Jñānayoga* is the yoga of knowledge and *bhaktiyoga* is the yoga of devotion. There are also such yogas as *mantrayoga* (focusing of uttering mantras) and *karmayoga* (turned to the good deed), all of these yogas stress different ways to attain yoking. (Pott 1966)

<sup>12</sup> The mind-body dualism, which is dominant in “Western thought”, is problematic in regards to yoga and other “Eastern” philosophical traditions and knowledge systems. (Desjarlais 1992; Feuerstein 2001; Flood 1996; Lock 2002; Strauss 2000, 2005; Yuasa 1987) I will return to this theme at various points.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

especially a methodological impact, I find it challenging to present yoga travel and practice as a field. These challenges are amplified by my own yoga practice and experience, and also by the yoga vocabulary. In short, it is hard to write in an anthropological and phenomenological manner without yoga shining through, and it is also hard to write about yoga without a phenomenologically influenced language. In other words, where does yoga end and phenomenology begin? Methodologically, I wanted to close in on yoga as (physical) practice by practicing. I have been practicing yoga since 2004, which means I had been practicing for about two years when I wrote my first research proposal to study yoga, and for four years when I finally received a grant to do the research. I had also been teaching yoga for a short while at this point. I have some insights into how yoga affects the body and how the practice feels when it is being done. I also have a bit of knowledge about the philosophy and thus, I am able to partake in conversations in an active way. On the downside, being an insider and seeing the practice through the eyes of the practitioners, there is a danger that things are taken for granted rather than questioned and explored. Having been immersed in the practice, it has been inscribed in my body to such a degree that it is sometimes difficult to trace the initial formation of “body and mind” therein. The same can be said of anthropology as a way of thinking (and being). Much of the initial reactions in and on “my system” and habits will have been re-framed, re-interpreted and plain forgotten as the practice has been integrated in my life and being.

Knowing the practice one is to study is a great advantage since the spectrum of inquiry broadens. The researcher has some inkling of where to look for the questions, answers, paradoxes, etc. that make a field interesting for study. Knowing the practitioners is important. On the other hand, the spectrum might become somewhat narrower as the practice is “naturalized”. Some answers are taken at face value, and the researcher doesn’t dig deep enough in the matter as the answers and statements made by those “under study” are understood within the framework of the practice, and perhaps felt to be “adequate and plausible”. The important naïveté of the researcher has been lost, and she is no longer the “curious child” who questions everything. Being too much into the practice, the questions and inquiries might become “theological” rather than anthropological. Put a bit differently: There is a danger that the research might take place *within* the confines of the practice – yoga in this context – rather than the research being *about* yoga as a practice among other

practices. Everything might become a question about what this and that means within yoga, rather than about why yoga is practiced in the first place. That being said: Being a yoga practitioner has been and is vital. I would have gained neither the acceptance nor the insights I did had I not been a yoga practitioner. By the end of this thesis, it will hopefully be made clear that doing anthropology “at home” and being deeply immersed in the practice one is studying, are not self-absorbent, self-indulgent acts of introspective navel-gazing and creating subjective stories about the anthropologist, but rather a powerful and necessary methodological approach.

Another challenge is to do research in a community where many have the same or similar level of education as the researcher has, which together with my own mix of entrance points, complicates the levels of debate and information. For instance, one of my “informants”<sup>13</sup> during my second stay in Mysore was a Norwegian professor who specializes in movement and experience, and for whom Merleau-Ponty is very familiar. Another person had written her master’s thesis on Heidegger. Our conversations on yoga thus became theoretical discussions on how yoga as a practice can be interpreted. In general, the students coming to Mysore to study yoga are rather well educated, and a few of them are even anthropologists. You might say that some of the data I have collected are pre-digested and pre-interpreted. These people are all to some extent “colleagues” who partake in the interpretation and contextualization of the yoga practice for the Western practitioner.

It was invaluable that my girlfriend, Elin Grotnes, was with me in the field. As a fellow anthropologist, she was an important partner in conversations, and it was truly brilliant to be able to share thoughts and ideas with her. Most importantly, she became a confidant and someone with whom to reflect upon information. Being able to test ideas and thoughts and particularly, being inspired by her insights and interests was, and continues to be, invaluable. A thing as “simple” as being two people who are recalling field experiences rather than only one is, of course, also of much help.

---

<sup>13</sup> “Informant” is a term I am not completely comfortable with, as it does not really describe the relationships that I had with the people I met and got to know during my fieldwork. I think this is the case for many anthropologists. I will use the term from time to time nonetheless, as I have not really found an adequate substitute.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Where does yoga and anthropology begin and end in such a context? This triggers another question: Is the answer to this question important, and if so, why? It is worth noting that these questions are important for me as an anthropologist, but perhaps not so much for me as a yoga student. These are theoretical abstractions and categorizations. These are lines and separations we as researchers try to draw in the lives of others in order to make these life (-worlds) more comprehensible to us and the readers, we (can only) imagine. In the practice, as in every other endeavour, everything fits more or less smoothly together in undivided wholes. My “anthropological inclinations” overlap, embrace and colour my understanding of the yoga practice, which envelops and embraces the anthropology. There is potential for a certain friction from being too involved in a field one is going to study. Such friction could be the risk of “contaminating” the material with one’s own pre-understanding, role-dilemmas (Barth 1996c), and under-communicating (Goffman 1990) one’s own identity, both in the field and in writing up the thesis. I would rather view these things as complementary aspects of my manners. As such, the Necker cube (Merleau-Ponty 2002; Rosen 1994) can illustrate the relationship between yoga and anthropology in my case. The switch between its two faces is a kind of “re-gestalt” where yoga can be seen as one perspective, while anthropology is the other. The two ways of perceiving the cube alternate, changing the background to the front, and vice versa. The Necker cube movement is contained within the movement through a Klein bottle (Brody 1971; Rapoport 2011; Rosen 1994), where the anthropological and yoga perspectives unfold from, but also are infolded in each other.<sup>14</sup> Both “aspects” are integrated parts of my life, which influence each other, though the scientific and anthropological perspective is to be embrave in this thesis. I will try to raise the anthropological perspective to embody both of the perspectives, making the anthropological view embrace the wholeness in the switch in the cube. If there are seemingly contradictory elements in someone’s worldview, these do not necessarily pose a threat to this person’s sanity or world, but might rather be complementary and make themselves visible at different times, or they may just not be contradictory for that person.

---

<sup>14</sup> More on the Necker cube and the Klein bottle later.



It might not be necessary to point out, – or it might even be detrimental to the credibility of this thesis – but my reports with the people who I have found agreeable, and with which I have had some of the same opinions of the practice, have been better than with the people with whom I have disagreed, or just found disagreeable. I think that, basically, any fieldworker has more interaction with people they get along with, than people with whom they do not get along. These people might even be portrayed in a kinder way – if not always fairer – throughout the thesis. Anyway, my interaction with people, and how we get along, will unconsciously have an impact on my portrayal of them, and since I have certain ideas about yoga, what it is and how it ought to be talked about, this will sneak into my presentation of the phenomenon, no matter how much I try to work against it and be conscious of it. That is the way the human mind works, and I think honesty in such matters is important.

As an anthropologist, I have tried not to intervene with my own ideas and presuppositions of yoga and yoga practitioners. I am human, though, and thus I too have filtered the data gathered through my own experience and prejudices, as this is a central proposition in my theoretical approach. On the other hand, I have hopefully let myself be inspired and thus changed at times, as many of the yoga students also have been. In this chapter, I will clarify my theoretical inclinations and their methodological implications, as well as how my fieldwork was conducted.

## 2.1 Embodying experience and knowledge: Theoretical foundations

... ethnography can become one of the ways in which social theory can be produced, that is, one of the ways in which we develop languages of the social that help us make sense of the world in which we live. (Glaeser 2006: 85)

Mol’s (2002) claims that objects are enacted in practice, and as what I want to look into is the practice of Ashtanga yoga, and the self-reflective<sup>15</sup> utterances of the yoga students, I believe I can get a glimpse of yoga and the yoga body “in the making”, or

---

<sup>15</sup> Many of the interviewees pointed to the self-reflection they gained from being interviewed, telling me that they had never “been made” to think things through and say them out loud before. Some jokingly said that I ought to start calling the interviews “yoga therapy” and start charging money for it. In “forcing” people into self-reflection, it might be claimed that I aided in the enactment of the yoga body and in making it clearer and putting it “out there”.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

“in action”, to paraphrase Latour (1987). Secondly, this insight can have methodological implications for a discipline such as social anthropology, as it can be helpful in both determining how anthropological knowledge is created/produced and how we are to approach others’ life-worlds in order to gain an understanding or representation of their realities.

All bodies carry some inscription of earlier experience – although previous inscriptions will be reinterpreted as new ones are made – and all bodies are situated. I will try to argue for this situatedness through Glaser’s (2006) notion of nodes, and Tsing’s (2005) concept of friction. I will argue that a node is a place of mediation and meeting – that is an arena of friction – where yogis and anthropologists alike can get further inklings of yogic and anthropologic reality and the workings of the universe.

There are always some preconceptions about what we will encounter in the field, although they are not necessarily conscious. At the most general level, we are trained anthropologists, and through our training, we have been moulded so as to see reality in a certain way – although how it is seen also varies in different branches of our discipline. Hastrup puts it this way:

As a scholarly discipline, anthropology truly *disciplines* its practitioners. By inscribing oneself into anthropology one submits oneself to particular rules. The rules are largely implicit and become part of the internalized, unquestioned practical knowledge of the trained anthropologist. (Hastrup 2005: 158)

These inscribed rules are a part of the preconceptions that we carry. They are a part of the ways that we think as well as part of what we think. Theories are a part of these preconceptions, and they might give us a sharper view of things before going into the field, or as Glaeser phrases it: “... theory gives us clues for tracing processes; it moves our gaze in certain directions” (2006: 80). Mitchell puts it slightly more pointedly when quoting Pasteur:

... the presentation of a case study is significant only in terms of some body of analytical theory. Pasteur's aphorism is highly apposite: ‘Where observation is concerned chance favours only the prepared mind’ (Oxford Dictionary of Quotations 1979:369). (Mitchell 2006: 37)

There is, of course, a need to adjust the theories as practices contradict them. Insights are mainly to be generated through field experience that is elaborated into more general theoretical importance (Kapferer 2007; for the relationship between theory and practice see also Kapferer 2006). Theory also guides us in a certain direction toward what methods might seem appropriate for research. This is also apparent in the situational analysis of the Manchester School, where

... situational analysis is at once a practice for empirically investigating practice and an implicit theory of practice, and therefore it promises an ethnographic unification of theory and practice. (...) Situational analysis became a way of theorizing practice as it was practiced, and so the embrace of practice and its theorizing inched toward praxis. (Evens and Handelman 2006: 5)

The methodological orientation, and thus the theoretical implications of the Manchester school, as presented by Evens and Handelman (2006), are useful tools for studying yoga as a practice, as well as an admonition for “anthropological soundness”. At the outset then – not counting our baggage of theoretical predispositions – practice takes the leading role, and theory should spring from the practice, feed back into it and fine tune further practice. Practice and theory are not easily separated on these accounts, but they build upon each other in a hermeneutical manner, and as method in some quarters is heavily linked to practice, method and theory are important partners in crime. The unification of and the dialectic between practice and theory amounts to praxis. The empirical findings and its analysis shape each other and this lays a foundation for “... anthropology not only *of* but also *as* practice.” (Evens and Handelman 2006: ix). As Evens and Handelman further assert of the Manchester School:

Though all praxis entails the shaping of practice by human consciousness, in the end, the latter can exist only on condition of practice. Put another way, though theory will have its day, practice always exceeds and surprises even the best-laid plans and most practicable ideas.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Arguing in a similar vein, Dewey writes:

Strain thought as far as we may and not all consequences can be foreseen or made an express [sic.] or known part of reflection and decision. In the face of such empirical facts, the assumption that nature in itself is all of the same kind, all distinct, explicit and evident, having no hidden possibilities, no novelties or obscurities, is possible only on the basis of a

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Practice generates its own emergent properties altering itself. (Evens and Handelman 2006: 4-5 – footnote added)

Practice entails experience, and in order to have an experience there is a need not only for doing, but also for undergoing – action and reflection – that might together bring insight (Dewey 2005). Reflection then fine tunes further action. Dewey (1958) takes experience as his starting point, and argues that habitual beliefs and expectations heavily influence what we experience and how. He makes the following claim:

Current beliefs in morals, religion and politics similarly reflect the social conditions which present themselves. Only analysis shows that the *ways* in which we believe and expect have a tremendous affect upon *what* we believe and expect. (Dewey 1958: 14)

A slightly less bold statement is that Dewey’s point supports the notion of anthropologists bringing some preconceptions to the field.

Although the disciples of Gluckman, and the tenets of the Manchester School, are not all that gracious towards the theories of Geertz and “... his apolitical American lit-crit hit mob...” (Evens and Handelman 2006: 161), I will claim that the goal and ideals of the Manchester School and the goals of Geertz (Geertz 1993 especially 1993b; Schweder and Good 2005) are perhaps not so different, though they speak in slightly different tongues and claim that their ways differ. Both “schools” aim to get at the world as it “really” is for others through a focus on the particular and their actual practice; only the Manchester School turns to a thorough description and Geertz turns (at least nominally) to phenomenology (1993b).

Where the social is pre-eminently a matter of practice, as in the extended case method (Evens and Handelman 2006), and practice is founded on the immediate experience of lived reality, there is a need for the anthropologist to grasp that experienced reality. Bodies are situated in specific realities, and act accordingly. Focusing on practice, but not – at least explicitly – acknowledging the body to a large degree:

... Gluckman moved to understand social life in terms of its lived, concrete reality. Broadly

---

philosophy which at some point draws an arbitrary line between nature and experience. (Dewey 1958: 21)

speaking, this move is logically identical to Bourdieu's (...), to a theory of practice, in which people are seen to act according to the particulars of the situation in which they find themselves. These particulars are essentially exigent and contingent matters (...). (Evens and Handelman 2006: 3)

This call for particulars is echoed to some extent by Geertz (1993; Schweder and Good 2005), and is parallel to my goal of capturing the situations in which the yoga students find themselves when unfolding their practice. In a festschrift to Geertz, Byron and Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good (2005) write about the ethnographies of Geertz:

... the subject embodies culture, lives in a distinctive phenomenal world (...) and has access to that world through a set of embodied practices (...)[,] practices and encounters with realities that “Clothe those conceptions with such an aura of factuality” (...). In these, culture shapes “the behavioural environment,” (...) as well as the “selves” who inhabit that environment... (Good and Good 2005: 100)

Both schools try to lend an ear to both actors and their framing contexts, although both fall slightly short of the balancing point between the two. As seen above, Geertz, according to his adherents, starts with the subject. The Manchester School, starts with “the predicament” but also leaves room for “an agential capacity”:

... the very practice of situational analysis produces, procedurally, a theory of practice, one that, given its situationalism, comprehends praxis (including ethnographic praxis) as an ongoing, open-ended dialectic, rather than a complete synthesis. Bear in mind that the very idea of situation, considered existentially, presumes not only a predicament but also an agential capacity on the part of the situated (with their different subjectivities) to negotiate the predicament by praxis. (Evens and Handelman 2006: 5)

In siding with Geertz (1993b) in the focus on phenomenology, I will try not to let go of the “situatedness” and “predicaments” of the Manchester School. Although we are bodies in the world, these bodies are not floating in a vacuum. I will look into how yoga practitioners create and establish their realities and themselves as practitioners in the interaction with their surroundings. As anthropologists carry preconceptions and ingrained theoretical inclinations when directing their gaze at the field, “ordinary people” take actions and experience based on their previous experience that is

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

influenced by their surroundings. There is always *something* that is embodied; the being-in-the-world always commences *somewhere*.

Geertz writes that “For human beings (...) all experience is construed experience, and the symbolic forms in terms of which it is construed thus determine (...) its intrinsic texture” (Geertz 1993b: 405). As anthropologists are mostly included in the category of “human beings”, not only is the yoga practitioners’ construed experience, but fieldwork is also construed experience. It thus follows that we are in need of knowing not only the symbolic forms under which others construe their experiences, but also those from which we ourselves interpret our experiences. This further might be said to constitute anthropology *as practice*, in the wording of Evens and Handelman (2006).

Glaeser ascertains of social formations that “... their ultimate material substrate consists of actions and reactions and thus human bodies” (2006: 67), and thus both the practice of yoga and the practice of anthropology are founded in the body and in bodied experience. Yoga as a project of the body and the self promotes such an intake. Tsing (2005) takes the travel of universal aspirations as an ethnographic object, and writes, “To turn to universals is to identify knowledge that travels and mobilizes, shifting and creating new forces and agents of history in its path” (ibid. 8). Following her lead, the knowledge and philosophies surrounding yoga are seen as mobile and mobilising knowledge. In the following, I will dwell upon the prospect of making the aspiration for the knowledge of yoga, and the journey *of* and *for* this knowledge, an object of anthropological inquiry. This journey, both inwards and outwards, is an important part of the situation and situating of the yogic subject and the yogic body, and the aspiration for the “correct” knowledge and experience of yoga is a central part of yoga practice.

In going into universals, I am moving “upwards” by trying to look into how one might best theorize different “levels” (e.g., local and global) of yoga as a phenomenon and the interconnections of these levels. Here, I turn to Tsing’s (2005) notion of “friction” and scale, and also Glaeser’s (2006) view of nodes. KPJAYI will be seen as a node, or a point of connection between actions performed at different times and in different places. The node is the arena where friction is encountered, and where ideas and knowledge are shared and developed. I will look into the social discourse of the

yoga community – or the local – as an arena for sharing experience, ideas and knowledge. Outside the different local communities of yoga practitioners, there are also “global” or transnational discourses that tend to be more “critical” in their take on different practices. All of these elements go into establishing a “personal practice”.

These characterizations might mark the anthropologists’ interactions as well as the interaction of “the others”. What is true of the anthropologist is equally true of the field of choice. As Tsing writes (2005): I:

... focus on zones of awkward engagement, where words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak. These zones of cultural friction are transient; they arise out of encounters and interactions. They reappear in new places with changing events. The only way I can think of to study them are patchwork and haphazard. The result of such research may not be a classical ethnography, but it can be deeply ethnographic in the sense of drawing from the learning experiences of the ethnographer. (Tsing 2005: xi)

This is a mark of interaction and practice in general, which again turns the focus towards “experience”. The quote ties together practice, experience and nodes both connected to the anthropological enterprise and “normal people”. An anthropologist that experiences, lives and learns in these awkward zones might embody this awkwardness, as do others dwelling there.

Yoga will thus be interpreted as knowledge and practice that is mobile as well as mobilizing. I will claim that these journeys, of knowledge and people, are transformative, for both the known and the knowing self. Further, as Tsing writes, “Engaged universals travel across difference and are charged and changed by their travels” (2005: 8). She later writes that “... friction morphs both knowledge of the globe and globally travelling knowledge” (ibid. 10). As Westerners embody yoga, yoga travels the globe and is changed. The same is true for the practitioners as they start practicing yoga and travelling to India to deepen their practices. Simultaneously, the repertoire of knowledge of yoga, the practitioners, as well as the anthropologists, retain something of their backgrounds – we are all marked by our history. I will attempt to show how this happens. As Penelope Harvey (2007) writes, “Knowledge, like all travellers, carry something of where they came from, the context in which they were formed, the motivations through which they were conceived” (2007: 168).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Yogis and anthropologists all carry previous experience in their bags – as does their knowledge – and this experience colours their present experience. So even if there are similarities and an agreement between yoga practitioners (as well as between anthropologists of different inclinations), there are also differences – there are zones of friction where people agree to speak and interact across difference (Tsing 2005). There are negotiations and ambiguities that are formative for the practice, as well as the practitioners.

### **Altering “systems”**

As new elements that are introduced into a system can change the system and the relationship between its parts, new knowledge, whether practical, physical or “mental”, can change the system that is the embodied self. As such, yoga which is both a highly bodied practice and, for most practitioners, a religio-philosophical set of knowledge, will in my hypothesis be partial in changing the outlook of the people travelling to India to study and practice. In the same vein, the yoga-travellers will have an impact upon the yoga tradition as such.

This can account for different notions of death, which again are founded on different notions of the person, as seen in Margaret Lock’s (2002) study on organ transplant and death. In different “cultural contexts”, the notion of “person” is located differently within, or also “between”, bodies (Lock 2002). In America, the “person” is perceived to be located mostly in the brain, thus making a definition of brain death as the end of life less problematic than in Japan, where the life-force is perceived to transfuse the whole body, and where the notion of “person” is highly dependent on social relations and the group to which one belongs (ibid.). A change in any of these – the practices, the phenomenal world, e.g., the physical surroundings, or the conceptions – might eventually change the self and its outlook in general. The journey to Mysore gives ample opportunity for an outside view of one’s society and one’s own place in it, as the marginal period of rituals do (Turner 1979; 1997). Yoga as an acquired practice that is embodied might be a very potent illustration of how the world is accessed through the body, and how the life-world might be changed through the change of practice. Reconfiguring and transforming oneself through travelling to



India and practicing yoga is often voiced as motivation, by those who go there. Yoga can be seen as a life altering enterprise.

Michael Jackson also turns to such a viewpoint when he sets out to:

... outline a phenomenological approach to body praxis which avoids naive subjectivism by showing how human experience is grounded in bodily movement within a social and material environment, and examining at the level of event the interplay between habitual patterns of body use and conventional ideas about the world. (1983: 330)

Going to Mysore to practice yoga represents transformations of the bodily movements, a change in the social and material environment, and will be shown to amount to breaches from the conventional ideas about the world.

This holds equally true for both the modern yogis and the anthropologist. Who is more aware of the fact might even be contested, as yogis are constantly being motioned to be aware of how the postures, and they as bodies, feel.

### **Methodological implications**

Modern day implementations of some of the Manchester school’s precepts and other anthropological orientations have, in later years, turned towards practice as an important notion for the anthropological quest. Importantly, what is sought is not only an anthropology *of* practice, but also an anthropology *as* practice.

Cultures, as well as practices, are embodied and enacted. In living different realities the subject sometimes “... begins to enact yet another culture. She is fluent in each, embodying one after the other with remarkable grace” (Good and Good 2005: 103). The embodiment and enactment of other cultures is a part of the anthropological project. As Kapferer ascertains:

The broad ideal behind fieldwork was the importance of attempting to live the realities of investigation or enter into as close an existential connection to them as possible, to get inside, as it were, the circumstances or dynamics of their production and of their effect. (2007: 191)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Though we are trying to get inside other realities, we also have to remain connected to the outside – especially to the academic world, but also connected to “our own worlds” back home. This amounts to a double description, and in this double view inherent in anthropological projects, there can always be found some notion of moral judgment. In being both on the inside and on the outside, in the comparison of the two, there is always something left out and something we *choose* to bring along. As Dewey ascertains: “Philosophical simplifications are due to choice, and choice marks an interest moral in the broad sense of concern for what is good” (Dewey 1958: 28).

Apart from “pure” philosophy, we as anthropologists choose to entangle ourselves in the worlds of others. Apart from choosing where to do fieldwork, there are always some choices as to what is important, and what is not so important. Although we usually do not say “this is good” or “this is bad”, our choices tell others something about what we find interesting and what we think of as less so. We always carry some inclinations, some notions of what it is we want to do, and having been inscribed into the anthropological discipline, we have to comply with certain standards of presentation in order to become or continue to be a part of the tradition. Although we can get some insights and notions of “their” lives, there is no unmediated access to “the other” and we always add something to “their” realities. Being insiders and outsiders gives us a privileged perspective, and we can address other things than what the natives can address, and in other ways (Hastrup 2005). Our strength lies in being betwixt and between – betwixt and between practices and betwixt and between “cultures”. (Desjarlais 1992; Bateson 2000, 2002, Kapferer 2007) Being inside and outside is the place of our discipline. Herein also lies one of our weaknesses – we cannot completely know the other and continue to be anthropologists. In experiencing and subsequently embodying difference, the anthropologist might gain insight and knowledge (Desjarlais 1992). However, the need for retaining the outside view that makes anthropology worthwhile (Hastrup 2005) keeps us from full fluency – except maybe for those “going native”, but they are no longer anthropologists as such. I strongly agree with Bruce Kapferer, though, that we need to strive for an “... immersion in lived realities so that an inside-out as well as an outside-in positioning could be developed, integral to the particular dialogic and reflexive questioning of anthropology” (2007: 189). We reflect upon society, and our reflections are based upon empirical material – that is, lived experience – and how we react on it. We

cannot be unbiased as we enter into relationships with our surroundings. We enter the life-worlds of others, and try as best as we can to live their lives and to inscribe *their* realities upon *our* bodies. (Desjarlais 1992) Thus this is the lot of the anthropologist. What we gain – or at least ought to gain – as anthropologists *in spe*, is the willingness to forge our bodies in the image of others. Being trained as an anthropologist is being cultured in ways of seeing and being in the world, and eventually reflecting upon these experiences.

Selective emphasis, choice, is inevitable whenever reflection occurs. This is not an evil. Deception comes only when the presence and operation of choice is concealed, disguised, denied. Empirical method finds and points to the operation of choice as it does to any other event. (Dewey 1958: 29)

Our method is (at least in part) to live and embody other realities, and through experiencing difference, to explore these differences. Our knowledge is lived knowledge, and embodied knowledge – even if we from time to time try to convince ourselves otherwise. The anthropologist ought to be conscious of the choices made and the partiality of his endeavour. There is a need for conscious reflection upon lived experience and the presence of the anthropologist in his texts.

According to Law (2004), reality is constructed in the act of approaching and dealing with it. Method constructs its object, and method is to a large degree a question of practice, and especially, a way of being. As humans, we are bodies and we experience the world as bodies being in the world. This being the case, as proposed by phenomenological anthropology, we need to be conscious of the body and how we inhabit our surroundings as bodies. The body is the prime tool for anthropological (and other) research, and to know other realities, we need to approximate embodying those realities as those inhabiting them do.

The consciousness of embodying experience and embodied knowledge is fruitful in the anthropological study of yoga as a practice of the body. Additionally, I will argue that the awareness of self as body in the world that is espoused in yoga can be a powerful reminder and awaken a much needed consciousness of the body that is often lacking in the western world where the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter has

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

been more or less omnipresent (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Csordas 1994). It is a way of getting to know our body-self (Scheper-Hughes 1994). A critique of the phenomenological approach in anthropology is that it is too subjective, that through the pronounced focus on the individual body in the world – often the body of the anthropologist – in the last instance, we can say nothing about the other. We can never fully acquire the reality of others’ because the experience of every individual is unique. I will argue that anthropological knowledge has always been produced *in between*. As anthropologists, we are partially on the inside and partially on the outside of the groups we study. We also look “between the lines” of what is said and done. We are somehow also trying to transcend the diverging perspectives of home and field, compare them, and bring them together, which is parallel to what I wrote about the Necker cube above. The way we as researchers can find our place “betwixt and between” (Turner 1979), and as such gain the dual view, is by trying to embody the life-worlds of others, “step back” and see the switch between the two, as well as the wholeness.

In “After Method”, Law (2004) proposes the term “method assemblages”, over the simpler term “method”. He explains the assemblage, and the relation to practice as follows:

If new realities ‘out-there’ and new knowledge of those realities ‘in-here’ are to be created, then practices that can cope with a hinterland<sup>17</sup> of pre-existing social and material realities also have to be built up and sustained. I call the enactment of this hinterland and its bundle of ramifying relations a ‘method assemblage.’ (Law 2004: 13 – footnote added)

---

<sup>17</sup> In his glossary, Law defines a hinterland like this:

Hinterland: a bundle of indefinitely extending and more or less routinised and costly literary and material relations that include statements about reality and the realities themselves; a hinterland includes inscription devices, and enacts a topography of reality possibilities, impossibilities, and probabilities. A concrete metaphor for absence and presence. (Law 2004: 160)

Law’s definition is interesting compared to Fyhn’s (2001) definition of “umwelt” as seen on page 50, note 25. Hinterland and umwelt both are about the nature assigned to reality, and how the world is experienced. There are different hinterlands and umwelts.

Later he asks, “... what *are* method assemblages, over and above a series of meditations that produce presence, manifest absence and Otherness?” (Law 2004: 104)

Important things to keep in mind throughout this text is interconnectedness of theory and method on the one hand, and the notion that method is not just a way of describing the reality/-ies, but it is also a way of creating it/them on the other (see e.g., Law 2004). As such, the methods of anthropology, as well as the methods of yoga, are creative acts of reality making. In studying a phenomenon a certain way, we are creating an anthropological reality through establishing our categories, and this can also have a real impact on the world out there. The yoga students are, likewise, establishing theirs.

As the connection between theory and method goes, what we theorise the world to be like is highly formative of how we try to get to know it, and on the flip-side, how we go about learning about our surroundings will play into how we conceptualize it. This of course ties into questions concerning ontology and epistemology. If, as Law (2004) claims, we create the world through our methods, and not only describe it, we need to be very careful and conscious when it comes to the methods we apply in our research, so as not to mistake our “discoveries” for *the* only truth. A part of this is also what we choose to write down and make notes of during our research, how we choose and further, which of these notes are rewritten and given room in our theses when the time comes for writing everything up. At every point, there is a choice of what to bring and how to take it with us, although these choices are coloured by tradition and other “constraints” of our trade. All sciences are sets of practices that have emerged from specific historical, social and associational contexts. Law (2004) writes that “... the suggestion that specific forms of out-there-ness are enacted and re-enacted makes it possible to think about which realities it might be best to bring into being. [But] (...) ‘Choice’, if this is an appropriate term at all, is limited by the need to relate to and build upon appropriate hinterlands that will sustain statements about reality” (Law 2004: 39). This can be said to amount to a statement saying something like: “You have to conform to (at least a minimum of) the characteristics of the category “social anthropology” in order to be let through the gate of the community of social anthropologist.” There are, by tradition, limits to what questions can be asked and

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

answered within a certain scientific branch.<sup>18</sup> However, these characteristics are not static, but rather negotiable and changing. The same question of conformity is true for the category “yoga” and “yogi”.

Reality is not “out there” to be mapped and described, but is created through our writings<sup>19</sup>, and we write as we are schooled, inscribed and formed to do in the anthropological forge. As Law (2004) puts it:

... it is not possible to separate out (a) the making of particular *realities*, (b) the making of particular *statements* about those realities, and (c) the creation of *instrumental, technical and human configurations and practices*, the inscription devices that produce these realities and statements. Instead, *all are produced together*. Scientific realities only come along with inscription devices. Without inscription devices, and the inscription and statements that these produce, there are no realities. (Law 2004: 31, emphasis in the original)

Entering this fray from a slightly different angle, but with the more or less the same argument, is Harry G. West (2007), who likens the anthropological project to sorcery on the Mueda plateau in Mozambique, in that they both make and remake the world by their interpretative visions of it. In short, ethnography is sorcery and we are all sorcerers. Our methods create realities by bringing some things to the limelight and pushing others to the background. Different questions make different realities.

Phenomenology focuses on the body in the world as the foundational aspect of human life. (e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2002) All of our experiences of our surroundings are as bodied beings, so this being-in-the-world must be our main focus as anthropologists. It is we as bodies that are inflected upon the world, and it is through us as bodies that the world works its magic upon us. An important topic is thus how the experience of yoga practice is embodied and influences the practitioner. Further, I want to look into the problems of conveying experience (of a mostly bodied practice) – both in acknowledging the challenges that the “informants” experience in imparting their experience, how experience (might) differ and the problems I have met in conveying

---

<sup>18</sup> As seen in the (in-) famous debate around Carlos Castaneda’s “The teaching of Don Juan” (1998) (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1999).

<sup>19</sup> This is also one of the points made by Geertz in his “Works and Lives – The Anthropologist as Author” (1988). There are certain rhetorical “rules” for how to write anthropology and establish authority within the discipline, and thereby for creating the anthropological reality. That reality is created through method is not explicit in Geertz’ writing.

both my informants and my own experience of the practice. This is closely linked to the questions Desjarlais poses in his book, “Body and Emotion – The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepalese Himalayas” (1992) when he writes: “To what extent can a person participate in another’s feelings or ideas? How can we best render this knowledge to others?” (1992: 35) Is the insider’s point of view, as Malinowski (1922) urged us to strive for, possible?<sup>20</sup>

Practice lays the foundation for all theorising and thus praxis, which is the unification of practice and theory (Evens and Handelman 2006). But even if practice runs prior to theory, they also mutually feed into each other – theorising runs parallel to practice.<sup>21</sup> Although the anthropological practice of fieldwork is the crucible, parallel theorising will help forge the amassing of information and tune the output. Cerwonka (2007) argues for a hermeneutically inspired method where fieldwork and gathering of empirical information runs hand in hand with theorising and reflection upon the material. This again is in line with Dewey’s (2005) theory of experience. This is true for yogic praxis, as well as anthropology, as the yoga practice and making sense of it cannot really be separated.

Practice lies at the base of yoga. The embodied experience of yoga is the main steppingstone. Being an inherently physical endeavour that is traditionally geared towards the “liberation” of the self makes Ashtanga yoga interesting to explore from a phenomenological viewpoint. Also, exploring the unfolding of a personal yoga praxis, through making sense of experience, can help us to understand, not only

---

<sup>20</sup> This touches on one of the eternal problems in anthropological debate: that of relativism and universalism. To sum it up in a rather crude fashion, we need to be a bit of both perspectives, and the “pure” version of both philosophical standpoints renders the anthropological project meaningless. It goes a little something like this: relativism at the extreme end makes comparison impossible as we cannot know how even our nearest neighbour thinks and sees his reality. We cannot say anything about others, because all is unique. Universalism at the far end makes everything the same, and thus it makes comparison uninteresting because there is no difference to find. Comparison depends on difference and some common ground. (For a fuller account, see, for instance, Larsen 1979) Also being relative implies being relative to *something*, which means that there is some comparison. Johansen (2008) states that comparison presupposes that information is already perceived, and further, that comparison of two elements has to be linked to a third element, which implies that they are related to a classification. That is, there is a level of a different order in the transfiguration. This presupposes that the classification is reflexive, and thus comparison is a reflection on a reflexive classification. Comparison is indirect. (Johansen 2008: 61) Further, he states that comparison includes both a notion of difference and non-difference, i.e. there are both similarities and differences, or else there could be no comparison.

<sup>21</sup> This is also in line with Cerwonka’s claim in “Nervous Conditions” (2007) where she argues that anthropological theorising should run parallel to the fieldwork but also feed back into the latter in order to tune it further to the central topics of the field.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

anthropological praxis, but embodied practice in general. Throughout this thesis, I will mainly use the term “practice”, but the unfolding of a “personal yoga practice” which as I will make clear in the following text, entail a unification of and dialectic movement between yoga philosophy and theory, and physical practice.

Phenomenology in anthropology is heavily influenced by Merleau-Ponty (2002), and is, as mentioned, characterised by a focus on bodies. The body is not only seen as a set biological entity, but also as a social and cultural phenomenon. The body is in flux, and we do not just “have” bodies,” we just as well “are” bodies. We are first and foremost bodies in the world, and all the experience of the world is founded as such. In phenomenological quarters, the body is an experiencing agent, and our bodily being-in-the-world is the base of us as experiencing entities. Experience and knowledge is embodied. We are “located” bodies, and this emphasis “... accepts the interpretive consequences of being grounded in a particular embodied standpoint – the consequence of relatedness, partial grasp of any situation, and imperfect communication” (Csordas 1994). To see the realities of others as much as possible as they do, we need to live their realities as much as possible. Law (2004) maintains that “... different practices tend to produce not only different *perspectives*, but also different *realities*...” (Law 2004: 13).

Even if we posit that we are bodies, experience is embodied and knowledge is bodied knowledge, the body-self needs to be located and seen in context. We do not exist in a vacuum; we are continuously being affected by impressions from outside the body, with which we actively manage.<sup>22</sup> And also, the bodies we choose to study as anthropologists are located “somewhere” – they exist in connection to other things, whatever they may be.

George Marcus (1995) lists “following the people”, “following the thing”, “following the metaphor”, “following the plot, story, or allegory”, “following the life or biography”, “following the conflict” and “the strategically situated (single site) ethnography” as different strategies of multi-sited fieldwork. In my vocabulary,

---

<sup>22</sup> These impressions are, of course, again embodied and made parts of our body-self. The body is, after all, the only tool we can know the world through, but the impressions do (usually) “come from somewhere”, at least from other bodies. Riegler (2007) shows though, that our cognition is not limited to receiving information from the outside.



focusing on the people includes both following them and their stories or biographies. Focusing on practice or phenomenon is akin to Marcus’ “thing”, and focusing on place – KPJAYI – is similar to strategically situating the research. Strategically locating the research entails choosing one field site without losing sight of its interdependence of and connections to other sites. It is important that the three alternatives being sketched here – the focus on people, place and phenomenon – are not mutually exclusive, but are interdependent to a large degree. Each alternative says something about what is highlighted rather than what is the sole “object of inquiry.” Although KPJAYI has been my primary field site, the locus of my study, the western yogis and their practice are more important and these have taken my research elsewhere as well. KPJAYI is only one (very important) place where the yogic body-self is situated, and where Ashtanga yoga as practice is constructed.

In “Positioning Yoga - Balancing Acts Across Cultures”, Sarah Strauss (2005), examines the global network of Sivananda yoga practitioners. Strauss (2005) originally went to Rishikesh to study only Indian yoga practitioners and at the outset of her research her project “... assumed the usual conditions of ethnographic research: a geographically and culturally circumscribed field site and community” (Strauss 2005: 15).

Upon entering the field, Strauss (2005) came to realize that in order to get to the yoga practice, a much broader approach was needed to sufficiently describe the community of those who entered yoga practice. Strauss, instead, ended up focusing on the multifaceted, transnational, cultural flow and a multi-sited fieldwork, following Marcus (1995), among others. In asserting that we are all cosmopolitans, she conducted her fieldwork in spheres of activity – “... rather amorphous and sometimes ephemeral spaces...” (Strauss 2005: 16) Strauss, in the end, chose to focus on the “community of practice” (2000) and she follows the threads and trails of people, publications, ideas and practice to better tell the whole story of yoga – and the international community that has developed around it – and to best pass on and impart hers and others’ knowledge and experience of the practice. Here, both the people and the practice take the front stage in the research, and Rishikesh, while being perhaps the most important field site, has to share the limelight with other locations.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

The experience of the practice again becomes vital and Strauss writes that “‘Doing’ and ‘being’ are at least as important – if not more so – as ‘knowing’...” (Strauss 2000: 172) The experience is not only vital to get a bodied understanding of yoga as a phenomenon and of the changes the yoga practice can entail, but also to gain credibility in the eyes of the practitioners. Strauss (2000, 2005) argues for the focus on practice as an empirical and theoretical imperative. To understand the impact that yoga might have on the individual body, there is a need to understand where this body comes from. There is a need to tap into the narrative of the body-self to get a grip on the intentions, wishes and hopes for the practice.

In “The Body Multiple”, Annemari Mol investigates how medical practices *create* bodies and diseases. Objects are things that are manipulated in practices. Events turn bodies into lived realities (Mol 2002: 6). Mol (2002) advocates a *praxiography*, where the practices that bring objects into being should be our main focus of study. While having important methodological implications, this theory can also help us understand and explain the manyfoldedness and contested “nature” of yoga bodies.

Methodologically, if Mol’s postulate is true, we create the objects that we set out to study by the very act of studying them.<sup>23</sup> As Law (2004) argues, methods are world-creating undertakings. My point, or perhaps concern, here is that such notions need to be followed by an even greater awareness of how anthropology comes about. Being-in-the-world is bringing forth the world, not only for “our informants” but for ourselves as well. Will adopting the practices of others also entail a greater understanding of “their” realities? Is this what participation means? This is in line with phenomenologically oriented anthropology (Csordas 1994, 2001; Desjarlais 1992, 1996; Jackson 1983), which argues that participation in practice inscribes life-worlds on the anthropologist’s body, thus making understanding possible: “The human body knows the world through its practical engagement with the world and with others in the world” (Moore and Sanders 2006: 11).

---

<sup>23</sup> See Fyhn (2011) for some fundamental pointers on perception, cognition and the manifestation of form.

## 2.2 Yoga and changing worlds

If reality doesn't precede practices but is a part of them, it cannot itself be the standard by which practices are assessed. But “mere pragmatism” is no longer a good enough legitimization either, because each event, however pragmatically inspired, turns some “body” into a lived reality – and thereby evacuates the reality of another. (Mol 2002: 6)

So how can yoga alter life-worlds? As seen above, a change in practice will change bodily movement, and thereby how the world is experienced. Looking to Dewey's (1958, 2005) take on experience, this can be linked to the notions of doing and undergoing. Having a real experience depends on these notions, only doing the action is not enough; there is also a need for reflecting thereupon. This reflection is then taken back into further measured action. The action and the reflection thereupon, feed back in future actions, much in line with Glaeser's (2006) action-reaction-sequences.

Mol's (2002) claim is that “... objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated” (2002: 5) and that reality multiplies if we see objects “... as things manipulated in practices” (2002: 4). For many of the yoga practitioners I met and talked to, yoga is not just the one and a half to three hours of morning practice, but an all-embracing way of living. The physical morning practice or *asana* practice has been a door into the world of yoga, but most keep adding layers of yoga philosophy, vegetarianism, meditation and ayurvedic remedies, just to mention a few things, to their lifestyle. As such, it might be said that yoga practice is not just one all-encompassing practice but many different, highly personalised practices gathering around the *asana* practice, which again multiplies the reality of both yoga and the yoga body.<sup>24</sup> Yoga is *enacted* in numerous ways, and thus the yoga body is an entity of multiple realities.

Although there are certain differences in Mol's notion of multiple bodies and realities, and Jackson's (1983) idea of breaking habitual sets by changing one of the components – that is ideas, experience or body – these differences are, in my view, more a question of perspective than of kind. When Jackson says that he will “...

---

<sup>24</sup> I am mainly writing about Ashtanga yoga here, but this of course is also evident in the many different strands of yoga practiced the world over.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

examine the interplay between forms of comportment and forms of cognition...” (Jackson 1983: 327) this resonates well with Mol’s view of practices that create realities. A change in reality due to change in practice necessitates a change in cognition. I suggest that as “... objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated...” (Mol 2002: 5) and as “... each event (...) turns some “body” (...) into a lived reality...” (Mol 2002: 6) this is the ontological and epistemological foundation to why “... a balanced pose bodies forth a sense of equanimity” (Jackson 1983: 334). Breaking the habitual relations in the “Jacksonian” (1983) sense might further help us recognize the manyfoldedness and multiplicity of reality that Mol (2002) postulates.

Yoga as a bodied practiced is much concerned with conscious action, and Michael Jackson (1983) could well be talking directly about yoga when he ascertains that

... stereotypical ideas and bodily habits tend to reinforce each other in ways which remain ‘set’ so long as the environment in which these attitudes are grounded itself remain stable.

Nevertheless, the habitual or ‘set’ relations between ideas, experience and body practices may be broken. Thus altered patterns of body use may induce new experiences and provoke new ideas, as when a regulation and steadying of the breath induces tranquillity of the mind, or a balanced pose bodies forth a sense of equanimity. (Jackson 1983: 334)

Yoga as breathing techniques and postures (*asanas*) can be interpreted into this without any change in the quote, as an alteration of body use, and thus a way of gaining new ideas, or a breaking of patterns, and entering a “field” of possibilities. Yoga practice, as an altered pattern of the body, represents a breach in habitus, and as the yogis to be journey to India this is also a disruption of the environment in which the practice is undertaken. These breaches then, from a phenomenological viewpoint, might be foundations for not only new orientations in the world, but new life-worlds, or *umwelts*<sup>25</sup> on their own. We might perhaps talk of lived realities, with the framing

---

<sup>25</sup> Umwelt as explained by Fyhn (2001) is:

... [Describing] the world as it is experienced in the world of experience, by consciousness, or rather, that which consciousness appears as. The nature of the *Umwelt* is the same as the nature any subject, consciously or not, assigns to reality. (Fyhn 2001, 10)

argument of Law (2004), that realities are created through method assemblages, in mind.<sup>26</sup>

In Mysore (to a larger degree than back home), the aspiring yogis are exposed to not only the *asana* practice, but a broad range of aspects related to the practice, and they learn as apprentices elsewhere as much through “... observation, mimesis and repeated exercise...” (Marchand 2008) as through words. Other students, with different levels of mastery, become resources in the learning process as exemplars both of “better” or “worse” practice, as conversational partners, and guides. There is a continuous sharing of knowledgeable skills and knowledge. The practitioners’ identities – the way they view and understand themselves – are transformed, affecting the way they act in and view the world, and as they delve deeper into the practice they learn the “proper” interpretations and propositions of experiences and events, as well as the appropriate values and ways of behaving (Lave 1991: 72). The identity of “yoga student” can be acquired by these processes, and the moral and aesthetic values of the yoga practice can be internalized and embodied. They are reconstructed as yoga practitioners. This broad exposure to participation in practice helps the students make sense of their experiences, and gives meaning and structure to their acquired skills (Lave 1991). The continuous transformation of newcomers into old-timers also ensures the continuous change and “development” of the practice itself, as well as its continuity. “... communities of practice and cultural processes of identity construction shape each other” (Lave 1991: 80). As Lave writes:

Both transformations of understanding and relations with peers raise questions about the cycles by which newcomers become oldtimers, who thereby become the community of practice for the next newcomers, transforming their understanding as they transform their identities. (Lave 1991: 81-82)

Such continuities and transformations are important in the daily exchanges of the yoga students, as will be shown. The community of Ashtanga yoga practice has changed since its inception. The modern practice of yoga has also changed a lot, and

---

<sup>26</sup> These ideas could again be tied to the idea of chaos or liminality as grounds for rearrangement. The Norwegian psychologist Ola Raknes (1927) writes about ecstasy, which in his terminology embraces meditative states, in a very similar manner as a state where structures are broken down and the mind can be reconfigured.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

there are changes in Ashtanga yoga (continuously). These days Sharath, Pattabhi Jois’ grandson and the present director, is forging his community of practitioners. Some of the old-timers today (and also some of their students) feel displaced and that their engagement in and way of practice is not valued enough. According to Lave, (1991) it is important to study

... the double and multiple articulations of ongoing activity in given situations and to explore various *forms* of tension and conflict over continuity and displacement in different communities of practice. (Lave 1991: 81)

But also, learning and practice are historically and culturally situated (Lave 1991), as is cognition (Riegler 2007). Knowledge is system-relative, and cognition is situated and dynamic processes, which are modulated by their environments (ibid.).

As a disruption of social environment, the journey to India will be likened to pilgrimage. Pilgrimage has been interpreted as liminal time, in the sense of Turner’s (1979, 1997) use of Van Gennep’s model of rites of passage. You leave home, are away, and come home – that is; there is separation, marginality and reintegration. The pilgrimage as liminal is transformative; structures are broken down and rebuilt, and the journey through time and space itself, transforms the traveller (Turner 1973). In stepping out off their everyday time schedules and leaving their homes the yogis, like the pilgrims, gain a different perspective of their lives, and thereby opportunity for reflections. Additionally, in acquiring (further) knowledge of yoga, and embodying the practice, the otherness of the experience is heightened. There is a potential for a transformation of not just the body through “training” but also of the mind through knowledge and the changed bodied world. The self can be reconsidered and reconceptualised through the embodiment of new knowledge and realities. As Tumbat and Belk (2011) have shown in their study of marketplace tensions in extraordinary experience among mountaineers on Mount Everest, though, we should not uncritically employ such notions as *communitas* and equality to all phenomena bearing some resemblance to pilgrimage. There can also be tensions due to different ideas of who deserve to reach the goal. Either way, travelling to Mysore can be a kind of restitution of the self.

There is a further parallel to pilgrimage and the journey to India, and that is fieldwork. The anthropological fieldwork can be similarly interpreted. The anthropologist nominally travels to other places to know that place and the people there, but in gaining knowledge of the lives of those people, the anthropologist inevitably – at least if he is a tad conscious – gain some knowledge or awareness of himself. This has of course been an inherent part of the anthropological project since “the beginning”. A difference between most fieldwork and pilgrimage, though, is the inherently “sacral” aspect of the latter. The anthropological project is a reflexive project, though. (Benedict 1989; Mead 2001; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1999)

Recontextualisation can be a potent source for reflection upon the self, though, and in travelling to India, and thereby placing oneself in a new setting, there is an opportunity for a reconfiguration. Practicing a new activity and gaining new knowledge likewise creates space for reflection and can change one’s way of seeing, and, thus, being-in-the-world. All new experience has this potentiality, although some experiences are more potent than others.

Self-reflection is important in the subjective turn. To uplift the self as source of authority and authenticity, there is also a need for knowing the self (Heelas and Woodhead 2005). Harvey claims that

... ideas travel when they are plausible and, as anthropologists have consistently shown, beliefs, especially those that carry powerful emotional and social charge, are usually far more plausible than the knowledge of experts. (2007: 178)

The idea and knowledge of yoga might as such have become plausible in an age marked by a subjective turn. Yoga philosophy resonates well with the introvert search for authority and truth. Yoga has become – or rather has continued to be – mobile because it is found convincing to the western mind in modern times.

Thus, this is the theoretical foundation of this thesis, and the analysis throughout the text will be unfolded in relation to this framework. Before venturing deeper into the yoga community and the unfolding of the personal yoga practice, I will only make a

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

short presentation of some of the more practical methodological approaches to Mysore as a field.

### **2.3 Doing interviews in Mysore**

Though the selection of respondents/informants in this research might neither be representative for Western yoga practitioners in general, nor for Western practitioners of Ashtanga yoga or even of those travelling to India in general, the selection is representative for those who travel to Mysore. These people are rather dedicated practitioners of the Ashtanga method established by Pattabhi Jois. I have interviewed and practiced with both men and women from different countries and also people of different ages.

To be frank I was a little surprised and also quite relieved at how easy it was to ask people for interviews in Mysore. At the outset I thought that questions about the practice and motivations for going India might be just a little too personal for many people to want somebody to probe too deep into. I was wrong. To begin with most were much interested in my project. They joked about their jealousy of me being able to stay for such an extended period of time, and getting paid to be there at top of that. As far as I can remember no one turned down my request for an interview, and a few actually strongly hinted that they wanted to talk to me and that they had “interesting” – i.e., usually critical – ideas of either the Shala or other students at the Shala. These were also the most restricted in choosing places to conduct the interviews, either preferring to do it at home or some place that was not too crowded with other yoga students. Not wanting to be overheard was perhaps the only thing that made some hold back on what they wanted to tell me. Usually quiet, slightly secluded places where chosen – places that if not devoid of fellow “yogis” at least offered the possibility to stay a bit away from the crowd. Many interviews were done at Barista, a western style café in Temple Road which is part of a larger chain of similar cafés, where there are tables both outside and inside, and that offers a wide range of coffee drinks, cakes and other nibbles. Although often slightly noisy from traffic outside and music inside, and a popular hangout for yoga students, Barista is ideal for a causal talk over coffee. Another place where I did many interviews was Sri Chakra House, a restaurant in Gokulam that caters mostly to yoga students. Chakra house is quieter



than Barista. I also did quite a few interviews at the popular breakfast place called Om café, which by 2011 had changed owners, and its name had become Anokhi's. Om is usually very busy in the morning from 8 AM, as an after-practice hangout. It is at Contour Road, and from the rather busy street you walk up the driveway past the garage where there is a small shop, and enter the quiet back yard. In the backyard there are stone tables, and lush vegetation. Most people sit outside, or under the roof by the toilet, but there are also tables inside, where there are rooms for rent and the kitchen. The interviews at Om here were often postponed a bit since people ate and chatted. That people preferred to be interviewed here testifies somewhat to the “openness” of many of these people. During interviews, people would drop by and say hi, etc. Only on one occasion did one of the people I interviewed want to switch to an empty table to speak freer. Otherwise, most of the “long timers” knew of my project and my interviews and would keep a little distance till we were done.

In total, I did some 40 interviews throughout my Mysore fieldworks. Most were done during my 2009 stay. Not all of these interviews have been transcribed in their totality, and not all have been utilised to the same degree. Approximately one third of the interviews have been transcribed in their entirety. All of the interviews and conversations have been important to establish representative and rich material, as well as a broader foundation for this thesis. Some of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian and Swedish, but for practical matters, all have been translated to English in the text. I have done all of the translations, as noted at the end of each excerpt (not after each question and answer).

People seemed rather pleased to be allowed to talk about the practice, and some thanked me for interviewing them and talked about the therapeutic value of putting unspoken thoughts into words. Some said that the interview was the first time that they had put their yoga beginnings into words, and had been “forced” to think through the path that they were on at the moment.

One thing to keep in mind about interviewing people in Mysore about their practice is that in Mysore it is “easy to believe”. Although most come from robust individual practices back home, it is easy to get caught up in the moment, so to speak, and quite a few seem to want to dedicate even more of their lives to yoga, also upon going back

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

home. Many of those who have just dabbled with yoga before going to India want to step up the game and practice daily upon returning, or at least several days a week. Back home it might not be that easy to keep up the pace of the practice, and keep the pace of the rest of the day down so as to fit the practice into the schedule. In Mysore the practice is the schedule. Everything in Mysore, at least in the life of the average yoga student, evolves around yoga in general and the practice particularly. Back home many other things vie for the attention. Keeping the good intentions of the daily practice might not be as easy as imagined, and quite a few things can look different from the home perspective. I can testify to this myself.

A methodological concern in this case, is the anthropologist as socialized practitioner. During my fieldwork, I was a part of the Mysore community, and a practicing yoga student. I came to recognise that I shared some of the same sympathies and antipathies as my “informants,” and that my views of the rights and wrongs of the practice to some degree resonated with theirs. According to Wikan (1992) this kind of resonance is a key to anthropological understanding, but straddling the hedge (Duerr 1991) between being an aspiring yogi, and a yoga student in my own right, and being an anthropologist, also makes it vital to be conscious of these complementary, but sometimes diverging, perspectives of (dedicated) practitioner and (observant) anthropologist.

In the following chapter, I will sketch out some contemporary tendencies that have been claimed to be important for the development and popularity of modern yoga practice. Additionally, I will present some research that has been done on yoga and yoga practitioners recently. In the continuation of that, I am going to touch upon the question of authenticity of modern-day yoga practices. This will be a foundation of presenting the Ashtanga yoga practice in more detail.

### 3: Yoga: Western History and the Practice.

Yoga is today a transnational phenomenon and classes can be found all over the world, or at least in most urban settings. This entails that traditions of yoga has been recontextualised, reinterpreted and recreated in different places, while perhaps somewhat paradoxically, it retains many ideas of being “authentic” and “ancient”. The question is: What is yoga to Western students, many of whom have dedicated much of their life to this practice, and how are these practices constructed? Secondly, there is the question of what “yoga” has become in these settings, and in this day and age. Of these questions, the first is the most important to me, but the second will also have to be expounded upon as the two are intertwined to a large a degree.

In this chapter, I will briefly try to get an understanding of what characterises our era and “contemporary culture”, which has been called variously “modern” (Heelas 1996, 2008), high modernity (Shilling 1993; Hedges & Beckford 2000), post-modern (Hedges & Beckford 2000), late modernity (Giddens 1993), and why yoga is found to be a suitable undertaking by so many “just now”. As the last part of this is underlying this whole project, this chapter will be a way of setting the stage for the further inquiries.

Just to be clear, as there was no single monolithic Yoga in so called “premodern” times (Pott 1966), there is no singular authentic Yoga of old that can rightfully be called *the* Modern Yoga today. De Michelis (2005) frames Modern Yoga, in this way:

The expression *Modern Yoga* is used here to signify those disciplines and schools that are, to a greater or lesser extent, rooted in South Asian cultural contexts\* and more specifically draw inspiration from certain philosophies, teachings and practices of Hinduism.\* These teachings and practices, by virtue of export, syncretic assimilation, and subsequent acculturation processes, have by now become an integral part of (primarily) urban cultures worldwide\* and are usually represented, disseminated, and discussed primarily (though not exclusively) by way of English language.\* (De Michelis 2008: 19-20. \* footnotes have been omitted.)

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

What is gathered under the heading of “yoga” is thus a wide variety of practices and ideologies, which individual practitioners undertake to attain an even more varied set of goals. Though, the yoga students I’ve chosen to study mainly practice Ashtanga yoga, as taught by Pattabhi Jois in Mysore these people are influenced by a much broader notions of what yoga can be. Thus, in this chapter, when tracing some of the history of the modern yoga practice, I’ll focus more generally on this inclusive term “yoga”, and what it might entail in modern-day usage (as also hinted at in the introductory chapter).

It needs to be noted that both the appellations “Modern Yoga” and “Modern Postural Yoga” designate categories established by researchers to catalogue and order the diverse field that is yoga as practiced, mostly by “Westerners”, today. They should not be mistaken as given schools or standards of practice that can be found “out there”. Diverse practices fit more or less into these categories, and thus are grouped together by force of some leading characterizations. Ashtanga is physical in orientation and most of the teaching focus on a set series of *asanas*. As such it fits De Michelis’ (2005) category of Modern Postural Yoga. I’ll describe the Ashtanga practice briefly later in this chapter.

### 3.1 “Modernity”

I am not at this point going to enter the fray of how to correctly tag the current age, but note that it has been characterised as ruled by various processes such as “de-traditionalisation”, “destabilisation”, “disenchantment”, anxiety (e.g., Giddens 1990), fragmentation, de-sacralisation, secularisation and finally reenchantment, and that the body and the self have been foregrounded as the only safe-havens people can discern in these dire straits (e.g., Heelas 2008; Shilling 1993), that might or might not be a radical breach or natural extension of that entity called “modernity” – whatever that might (have) be(en). And whether or not these tags and theories are right or wrong in their characterisations, their catch-phrases seem to have trickled down to ordinary men and women, who are starting to feel and reenact the scenarios that have been painted. As such, the body has become a project to be tuned and worked on in an attempt to find, create and build new and better selves.

In this jumble of ideas about the development of our near past, present and future, “religion” and “religiosity”, have come to take central positions, often as waning, and later also as waxing, especially in the guise “spirituality”. Though, this thesis is not about “religion” as such, the issue has to be approached as yoga by many is deemed to be a spiritual and sometimes religious practice. As we will see, many of my friends in Mysore are much preoccupied with untangling such issues and how they relate to their personal practice. Featherstone’s (1991) description of Bell is telling of a tendency in the story of modernity’s negative impact on human society:

Daniel Bell’s (...) concern about the deleterious effects of cultural modernism can also be related to the German tradition of societal rationalization and *Kulturpessimismus* (...) in which contemporary mass consumer society is perceived as atomized, impersonal, and bereft of meaningful social bonds and means of integration. It is therefore not surprising that Bell has been accused of nostalgia in seeking to advocate a religious revival to restore the social bonds apparently endangered by cultural modernism (...). (Featherstone 1991: 145)

It has been argued that modernity and capitalism came armed with rationality and science, and thus wrought secularisation and de-sacralisation upon the world. Religion, spirituality and other superstitions were rendered obsolete, and it was proclaimed that God was dead. Fast-forward a few decades to the fall of modernity and its fragmentation into its “post-form”. Bell is advocating religious revival, and also others are trying to bring back, if not God, at least the God within, as anxiety, alienation, and existential angst erupted with the realisation that science cannot give us eternal answers to our existential questions. Robbins (2009) says of the postmodernity and postcolonial discourses, and their call for a social reconstruction where old certainties have become void, that they were “... early elite responses to the unsettling effects of neoliberal globalization on the sureties of Western thought” (Robbins 2009: 69). The world is now being reenchanting, or so the story is told, though we are turning inwards searching within for spiritual empowerment.

The story is told with some variations, but these scenarios have been sketched out by quite a few. Of course, the images of two planes crashing into two towers in the home of the brave 11 years ago, brought religion back into our lives in a big way as the

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

cowboys rode into the battle against Islam.<sup>27</sup> Religion was alive and rearing its ugly head in the form of terrorists who declared war on democracy. God was standing against God.

Though somewhat caricaturised, this is not far from the popular mind. I will argue that religion, in Csordas’ rather minimalist definition or understanding (2004, 2009), which covers both standard understandings of religion and spirituality, has never been gone. Csordas (2009b) establishes “... religion as phenomenologically predicated and culturally elaborated from a primordial sense of alterity or Otherness...” (2009b: 4) and thus a fundamental structure of embodied existence. “Religion” is inevitable (Csordas 2004, 2009). Though, like Robbins (2009) not necessarily wholeheartedly agreeing that this sense of alterity is the sole source of religious experience, I think this sense of “religiosity” is a potent starting-point for understanding religious and spiritual experience among yoga practitioners. It is also interesting related to Heelas (2008) notion of “spiritualities of life”, which Heelas contrasts to religion. It has been claimed that there has been a turn from “religion” (governed by external Gods), towards “spirituality”, where authority is rather sought within.<sup>28</sup> Both these notions would be included as “religious” if following Csordas. I will keep Csordas definition in mind, but tentatively use (and contrast) both terms, as this is in line with the yoga student’s usages. “Spirituality” and “religion” might perhaps be seen as different ways of elaborating alterity as alterity “religiously” (see Csordas 2004: 173). Even “the God within” or an “inner power or authority” is a sense of Otherness.

Whether or not the reader is embracing Csordas (2004, 2009) definition, I will claim that “religion” has always been there, alive and well, though we (both as “normal” human beings and as scholars of human undertakings) might not always have shown it much interest. I would argue that we have been under the same sway, and caught on

---

<sup>27</sup> Csordas (2004) calls a certain moment 9/11 a “... raw religious experience, prior to morality, (...) prior even to meaning” (Csordas 2004: 175), but also see other religious aspects in the incident and its aftermath.

<sup>28</sup> Heelas (2005) actually claims that while we are experiencing *secularisation* with regards to what he calls “life-as forms of religion” – i.e., emphasising transcendent and external sources of significance and authority to which individuals have to conform – we are simultaneously experiencing *sacralisation* with regards to “subjective-life forms of spirituality” (which he later calls “spiritualities of life” (Heelas 2008)) – i.e., forms of the sacred emphasising inner sources of authority and significance, and cultivating unique subjective-lives. Yoga as a practice can be categorised under the latter tag. Both these forms of the sacred can be fit within Csordas’ (2004, 2009) understanding of religion.

to the idea of religion's downfall, because "religion" has been changing its prevalent expressions from time to time.<sup>29</sup> With the downfall of many mighty religious institutions, and as religion apparently was relegated to crooks and crannies of society, we took it as a sign that it was gone. It was just personalised (in our part of the world). Religion has of course always been more or less personal, but when the external edifices of institutionalised religions were demoted, the religious of the Western world became its manifestations. After 9/11, religious differences were politicised, and religion in the most brutal way was brought back into people's consciousness. "You are either with us or against us!" Religion became rallying points, because that and *their* backwardness and fundamentality were the most obvious difference between them and us. Additionally, we dressed the conflict in religious imagery. I think this is also an important reason why my friends in Mysore felt it necessary to demarcate themselves from religion. I am not religious, I do not believe in the God I was taught to believe in and I cannot believe that this bearded man has anything to do with my practice. Yoga is not a religion. My practice is spiritual. I believe in God as a higher energy, I believe in the God within, God is everything. What they are taking a stand against is religion – or rather politicised religion – as religion has been "actualised" in later years. They associate religion with the clash of civilisations, with vengeance and with oppression, because these wars and conflicts – and many, many conflicts throughout history – have been waged with the vocabulary of the religions of their upbringing. The bearded man of a God they heard about at Sunday school is the image that is evoked when presidents, mullahs, prime ministers, priests, and laymen alike invoke *their* God in their vocal and real attacks on *the Others*. Thus yoga practitioners and others need to cloth their experience of alterity and otherness (Csordas 2004, 2009) in different regalia.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Here I could go on to Csordas' (2004) take on Gauchet's "disenchantment", which perhaps might be interpreted "... as an escape of alterity from the domain of the strictly religious, such that the sacred does not disappear but becomes diffused through reality, rendering the human world even more rather than less a religious phenomenon" (Csordas 2004: 173). My project here, however, is not to explain the "reenchantment" or place of religion in the world today, but in rather crude strokes paint out the background and a popular understanding against which yoga practices are unfolded.

<sup>30</sup> I will return to the practitioners' view of religion and spirituality in chapter 8, where I will also suggest a different way of viewing "religion". "Religion", I will argue can be understood as something with an all-embracing significance or weight of meaning. In Riegler's (2007) term it can be viewed as a schema, or schemata, whose importance is omnipresent and omnipotent, meaning that it is relevant for *all* conditions and influencing *every* action.

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

The ideas of modernity (and its eventual aftermath – if modernity ever “stopped” – in whatever form it is depicted, (the “rebirth” of) “religion”), and the body as project are intimately tied together, as this thesis will attest to (at least implicitly). I will argue that the connections rest partly on what Giddens (1990) diagnoses as “reflexivity”, which he claims is an inherent part of modernity, and that subverts another “poster-boy” of modernity, namely “reason”. He writes:

... this idea only appears persuasive so long as we do not see that the reflexivity of modernity actually subverts reason, at any rate where reason is understood as the gaining of certain knowledge. Modernity is constituted in and through reflexively applied knowledge, but the equation of knowledge with certitude has turned out to be misconceived. We are abroad in a world which is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but where at the same time we can never be sure that any given element of that knowledge will not be revised. (Giddens 1990: 39)

The subversive power of reflexivity, which is seen in the ever-revisability of knowledge<sup>31</sup>, creates anxiety. A feeling of loss is a symptom of modernity (Shilling 1993). There is a feeling of loss, an idea that something important has been lost, as our Western society has been developed into what it is today. We experience a loss of connectedness and wholeness. We are no longer connected to the environment in which we live – our surroundings and we as humans have been fragmented. There is no compassion in society anymore; all people are left to fend for themselves. Individualism reigns. We have lost our souls as materialism has won ground, and we have lost our emotions as “rationality” has been pushed into the limelight. Spirituality and religiosity (except fundamentalism) have been sacrificed at the altar of science and abandoned, for the sake of capitalism. We have lost our connections to nature and the environment, which have also been sacrificed in the wild chase for economic winning. We have been alienated from our natural ways of being as humans, as our lives have been fragmented and specialized. We are rational minds with bodies that can be manipulated into whatever we want them to be, or at least that is what we are led to believe. This last point ensures our freedom it would seem, but even freedom

---

<sup>31</sup> People’s trust in science and medicine is undermined by the steady onslaught in the media of miracle cures, and deadly medicine, healthy and unhealthy living, food that one day will extend your life, the next end it, “new research” that uncovers the “truth” of our biological workings, but the next day even “newer research” proclaims yesterdays news as obsolete. The belief that the world can really “be known” is undercut by (the medias crooked presentation) of “scientific progress”.



can be burdensome, because it comes with a demand of being successful and “true to oneself”. These are all prevalent ideas in our society.

But our riches has also brought us views of different worlds, worlds were different lives are led (Appadurai 1996). As we travel, read, watch movies and television, and browse the World Wide Web, we are allowed glimpses of “easier”, more “natural”, and “authentic” lives and realities, which though might be the reason for the feeling of loss in the first place, also bring hope that there are alternatives out there. “Globalisation”, so called, paradoxically, by showing us alternative lives, breaks the illusion of something given, and exposes the futility of materialism, but also gives hope as the “truth is out there”.

The feeling of loss and alienation, leads some people to apathy, while others are led to seeking the truth or the authentic. They want to be reconnected with themselves and with the world. They want to get back to a more natural way of living. This idea goes rather far back, at least to the age of discovery when the “noble savages” of the Americas, Africa and Asia were “discovered” by the Europeans. There were also the discoveries of ancient civilisations in these parts of the world, and Europeans were dazzled by the knowledge and philosophy of ancient China and India.

Yoga can be seen as part of what Heelas (2005) call the spiritual revolution, where individual experience is the vital point of departure. It is further often advocated as a system of philosophy rather than a religion, but importantly it is a philosophy where the whole being is in focus. The interest in yoga can also be seen as part of a shift in bodily focus as part of consumer culture, where the youthful and healthy body has become the latest trend. The body is to be kept in shape, and yoga is widely sold as a miracle cure towards a balanced body. In a society demanding high productivity and efficiency, yoga also promises stress-relief, and a time-out in an all too hectic everyday life.

The spiritual, extraordinary and otherworldly are all connected to yoga practice. Yoga emerged as part of a religious regime, a way of disciplining the body on the way to *moksha* or *samadhi*. Traditionally, long-time and dedicated practice of physically demanding yoga could also give rise to magical powers (Jacobsen 2012) that were

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

both a boon to the yoga and a danger since the huge personal power could lead the practitioner astray (Feuerstein 2001). Yoga as meditation can according to the scriptures give the adept a glimpse the true reality behind the veil of *maya* – the illusion that is the world we occupy. Also modern day practitioners of yoga testify to the powers of yoga and meditation in giving both insight in the true working of the self and reality and an outlook on the world.

According to Heelas (1996) New Age has to do with “... the human (and planetary) condition and how it can be transformed” (1996: 2). As such yoga can be said to fall under the New Age headline as much of the talk about yoga concerns just this transformation. The language of transformation is by Heelas (1996) called ‘self-spirituality’. The Self is sacred and “... the initial task is to make contact with the spirituality which lies within the person. There is thus a general agreement [among New Age movements] that it is essential to shift from our contaminated mode of being – what we are by virtue of socialization – to that realm which constitutes our authentic nature” (Heelas 1996: 2). Yoga can also be seen as a part of the New Age movement, which is characterised by “... questing within to effect change” (Heelas 1996: 17). Yoga as a faceted practice thus seemingly can answer to many calls in our time.

### 3.2 A brief History of Western yoga practice

As I have already established: The roots of yoga, how it has changed since, and what can be considered authentic and true, ancient yoga, is not what I am trying to discern with this thesis. I am not overtly concerned with the history of modern Western yoga. My main concern is with yoga as a personal practice – whether it is considered physical and/or spiritual – and how yoga is seen as an instigator and catalyst for change. Questions concerning authenticity are mostly interesting in instances when the yoga students who are a part of this study address them. As such I will just sketch briefly some of the main arguments presented by scholars of yoga in the modern world.<sup>32</sup> These scholarly debates are interesting since there is overspill from them into the yoga community, and the community’s own interpretation of the practice, and its

---

<sup>32</sup> “Yoga in the Modern World” is the title of anthology edited by Singleton and Byrne (2008). This book gathers many of the foremost scholars of modern yoga practice.

philosophy. For instance, when Broad (2012a) in the New York Times writes that yoga can wreck your body<sup>33</sup>, the reactions are a way of delimiting what yoga is, should be, and how it is to be interpreted. Defining own interests in opposition to others' is part of all self-identification. For a more indebt study of the development of modern yoga, I recommend De Michelis (2005, 2007) for an overview of many of the contributions made in this field. In addition to Singleton and Byrne's (2008) anthology, I will also rely on writings by Alter (e.g., 2004), Strauss (2005), Smith (2007), Sjoman (1999) and Singleton (2010) in this presentation. Many of these writers are also represented in Singleton and Byrne's (2008) collection. Additionally Love (2010) has written about the early history of yoga in the USA in his book on the rise and downfall of "The Great Oom", as one of yoga's early pioneers Pierre Bernard was known. Syman (2010) has stretched her history of yoga in the USA till today, in her book on "The Subtle Body".

Briefly put, van der Veer (2009) says that yoga is a system of breathing and physical exercise. Patañjali's "Yoga Sutras" which was written around the fifth century C.E. is a foundational text, and the system was "... reformulated at the end of the nineteenth century as a part of Hindu nationalism but simultaneously as a form of Eastern spirituality that was an alternative to Western society's colonial materialism" (van der Veer 2009: 246). As such yoga is both ancient and modern, which I think is part of its modern-day appeal, together with its spiritual overtones in our material world. Yoga as a spiritual practice fosters transcendence through the body, and the system is today embedded in ideas of health and good living worldwide (van der Veer 2009). He further traces yoga's popularity in the West to the 1960s when it became a part of the youth revolution (ibid.), and I'll claim that though yoga as a practice has become more mainstream it still retains some traces of social critique in a Western context.

In his "The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace", Sjoman (1999) traces the history of the yoga traditions of Mysore Palace, which is the source of some of the main systems of modern yoga, such as the Iyengar Yoga of B.K.S. Iyengar and the Ashtanga system of Pattabhi Jois. Both these modern-day gurus trace their lineage through Krishnamacharya who perhaps more than any others was the one "Guru" who

---

<sup>33</sup> I will return to this controversy in Chapter 7.

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

opened the practice of yoga to Westerners. Among other things, Sjoman relates the development of modern yoga practice to “modern day” influences from Western gymnastics, but also the tradition of Indian wrestling. Although slightly controversial, according to the author himself (Sjoman 1999: 6-7), these are interesting insights into the (recent) developments of a practice that is sometimes seen as “eternal” and/or “authentic”.

Somewhat in the same vein Joseph S. Alter (2004) in his “Yoga in Modern India” challenges the idea of a timeless and unchanging yoga by looking into yoga’s (re-) emergence in Modern India, and the transformations it has undergone in the twentieth century. Alter (2004), briefly put, argues that modern ideas about science and medicine are the foundations upon which yoga has been transformed into an activity celebrated for its health value.

De Michelis (2005) also traces the historical and ideological roots of modern yoga practice. She also establishes a typology of modern yoga (De Michelis 2005: 187ff) that many other scholars of modern yoga turn to (e.g., Singleton and Byrne 2008). In her fourfold typology, Ashtanga yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois, typically falls into the category of Modern Postural Yoga (MPY). Looking especially into Iyengar yoga, and discussing central religio-philosophical tenets of modern yoga, she concludes that MPY typically show characteristics of healing rituals of secular religion. De Michelis has also written a brief survey of studies on modern yoga (2007).

In an approach more similar to my own, Sarah Strauss (2005) in “Positioning Yoga” also explores the developments and transformations of yoga, but focuses more on the practices, its transnationality and the community of practitioners. The definition of yoga has to be located within particular historical contexts according to Straus (2005). Looking in particular at Swami Sivananda’s Divine life Society, she sees modern yoga as a cross-cultural practice of people seeking health and freedom. Yoga as a practice connects both body and mind, or reconnects people to their selves, and also connects the self to “nature” or to a harmonized connection to the universe and the environment. Herein lies yoga’s attraction to the modern consumer, according to Strauss (2005).

In their anthology “Yoga in the Modern World” Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne have collected several of the central researchers on modern manifestations of yoga. De Michelis (2008), Alter (2008), and Strauss (2008), are all represented.

Of special interest to this study are Klas Nevrin (2008) and Benjamin Smith (2008) who both focus on experiential aspects of *asana* practice. Smith has even done research at KPJAYI. Nevrin’s focus is on the body and empowerment through yoga practice, while Smith (2008) looks at aspects of discipline and authority in Ashtanga practice. Both authors will resurface later in this thesis.

Singleton and Liberman (both 2008) tackles notions of authenticity in their contributions to the anthology (Singleton & Byrne 2008). Singleton explores the uses and misuses of Patañjali’s “Yoga Sutras” in relation to modern yoga, while Liberman focuses on reflexivity and authenticity in Haṭha yoga. Interestingly Liberman (2008) makes strong statements as to what can and cannot be considered authentic yoga today. He argues that yoga practice without some basic moral practices cannot be considered authentic yoga.

He also bemoans the lack of room for “spiritual matters” in modern yoga studios and practices. I will return to these matters later on, but I will remark that many of the contributors on academic research are also dedicated yoga practitioners. This might be one of the reasons that normative statements such as Liberman’s (2008) above are not uncommon in their writings.<sup>34</sup> The question of authenticity deserves some special attention.

---

<sup>34</sup> In criticising other scholars of yoga as being too normative in considering what a yoga practice should be, and how it ought to be studied, I too become a part of such a discourse. I too say that yoga can and should be studied in a certain way, and also implicitly say something about what yoga can and should be (“What the practitioners themselves say it is to them”). I want to study how it is actually enacted today, by these people, and portray *their* negotiations on what matters the most (based on their own experience). Alter (2004) writes: “Because the focus of analytical attention is on how Yoga has been made to make sense over the course of the past century, there is no sense in which this book seeks to define Yoga’s authentic form or delimit its authoritative canon” (Alter 2004: xiv). But, I will argue: It can be read that way. My thesis can to some degree be seen as a continuation of these scholarly expositions, and I will see how these people make sense of yoga today, in *their* lives.

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

### 3.3 Is yoga “authentic”?

I will not answer this question, neither here nor elsewhere in the thesis, but it needs to be asked, if only as a way of explaining why I will not venture too much onto this topic. “Yoga” is a contested entity, both in regards to what the term contains, what it ought to contain, and who can practice whatever it is. In February 2011 Nanda (2011a) published an article called “Not as Old as You Think” in Open Magazine, where she debunked the prevalent myth of yoga’s eternal form and the purist position that all yoga is firmly rooted in Hinduism and ancient in origin. She, like Alter (2004) and van der Veer (2009), traces much of yoga’s modern form to Indian nationalism and Western gymnastics<sup>35</sup> and points to the absurdity of the “take yoga back” movement, which is trying to reclaim yoga as the “intellectual property of Hinduism” (Nanda 2011a). According to Nanda (2011a) yoga is neither Vedic nor eternal, and “... modern yoga was born in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries” (ibid.). This rebirth of yoga – and particularly as a physical practice of *asana*, which prior to this had been looked down upon by intellectuals and reformers – rests partly on the fabrication of ancient texts (of which one of her examples is the “Yoga Korunta” Pattabhi Jois supposedly studied with his teacher Krishnamacharya) in trying to establish ancient lineages. Modern postural yoga, Nanda (2011a) claims, is a global innovation, and Hinduism has no special claim to the practice of postural yoga.

The Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which was heavily criticised in Nanda’s (2011a) article for trying to take yoga back, countered a few days later (Venkataraman 2011a). Their main argument is that yoga is much more than *asana* practice and that practitioners ought to acknowledge its Hindu origins. Yoga is fundamentally religious, and is passed down through the *guru-shisha parampara* (guru-disciple lineage). Venkataram (2011a), referring to Singleton, claims that though *asana* practice is similar to gymnastics it is not enough to deny its Hindu heritage, and that even Singleton does not claim that posture based yoga is more or less spiritual than other forms of yoga. Venkataram (2011a) and HAF’s project is not to claim ownership of yoga, but to root it “... within the metaphysical framework that practitioners eventually discover on their own” (Venkataram 2011a).

---

<sup>35</sup> In these matters Nanda (2011a), and on the tradition of the Mysore palace, form where much of the modern methods of yoga run, she refers to Sjoman and Singleton (without listing exact references).

Nanda (2011b) answers this by amplifying her message, saying that Venkataram and like-minded people have no choice but to try to discredit the history of yoga that now is being unearthed by historians and scholars, "... since the entire rationale of the campaign 'to take back yoga' (TBY) (...) rests on the assumption that Vedic or Sanskrit Hinduism is the mother (...) of *all* yoga, modern asanas included" (Nanda 2011b). But facts are stubborn, and "taking back yoga" is a ludicrous idea. Retracing modern yoga's diverse and composite sources, she says that claiming that yoga stems from 5000 years old monolithic traditions, as the HAF does in their campaign, is simply false. We should instead "... enjoy the mongrel that this thing called modern yoga is" (ibid.).

In his answer, Venkataram (2011b) accuses Nanda of Hinduphobia, claiming that she skates around his numerous references to ancient texts on *asana* and *pranayama*, and that both Singleton and Sjoman acknowledges that there are textual and other sources to some *asana*, and that not all are similar to modern calisthenics. The HAF only want practitioners to recognise that yoga and the concept of *asana* "...arose, and remains, an integral part of Hindu spiritual practice" (Venkataram 2011b). Further, he argues that, even when practiced only as an exercise, yoga cannot be severed from its Hindu moorings.

Partly as an aside, though an interesting one, this relates to religion as a transferable ideology. Csordas (2009b) argues that yoga is a prime example of a *portable practice*. It is a bodily practice that is easily learned, can be performed without committing to an elaborate ideology, and requires relatively little esoteric knowledge. It can also be performed both alone and collectively. As should be clear, yoga's "portability" is at the heart of the above exchange. Brunk and Young (2009) point to challenges of appropriation of religion, and point out that it can lead to depriving people of their beliefs if they are led to see them in the distorted way it might be perceived by outsiders. If outsider experts present their appropriated beliefs and practices as authentic, that is truly that of the original culture, this can lead to a distortion of indigenous beliefs, for example by "read-back" effects. This might be partly what the HAF is afraid of. It can also be claimed to be happening in the case of yoga, as modern postural yoga is growing in popularity as a fitness trend in India. On the other hand, Brunk and Young (2009), argues that if outsiders actually truly believe in a

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

certain belief, they can hardly be considered insincere and as acting incorrectly. Such an adoption of a belief is rather “... profound honouring of the culture insofar as it affirms its validity” (Brunk & Young 2009: 100-101). In respect to religious beliefs, it can also be argued they say (Brunk & Young 2009), that holding them are due to evidence available to the holder, and thus religious adherence is not completely voluntary. Yoga practice, though often undertaken as exercise, is often reported to develop into “something more”. This “something more” is, as we will see, usually framed in a spiritual vocabulary and based on the personal experience of the practitioner.<sup>36</sup> Thus, not depending on the “authenticity” of any certain yoga practice, I will argue that most yoga students are sincere in their practices. It is such unfolding practices I’ll take as my topic.

The Nanda-Venkataram<sup>37</sup> exchange is as such not presented as a complete presentation of the debate on yoga’s origins and its status as a practice today. Rather it serves an illustration of the debates evolving around yoga’s authenticity and spiritual content in an era where it finds ever more followers, both as a spiritual path and an exercise. Interestingly this exchange is between a scholar and a “believer”, both citing scholars and historians in trying to promote their views. As such scholarly work on yoga is not (seen as) neutral (or objective, whatever that is) presentations of “yoga’s life and heritage” but rather included in the ongoing debate about the “nature” of the practice.<sup>38</sup> Some students also read these books, and those who are critical will use the books to boost their arguments, as for instance when Jim, a long time Mysore resident, referred to Alter and Sjoman to discredit some of the most “fanatic” practitioners who could find no fault in Ashtanga as taught by Gururji and later Sharath, saying things like: “Ashtanga is not an ancient’s practice, but was invented

---

<sup>36</sup> As such, Venkataram (2011a) might be right when he writes that practitioners often become aware of the metaphysical framework at the root of yoga. I will refrain from judging what kind of spirituality practitioners encounter, though many seem to cater to a more “universal” spiritual understanding than a “purely Hindu metaphysic”.

<sup>37</sup> Shukla (2012), a co-founder of the HAF, argues in a similar manner, though in a different context, when she in her answer to Broad’s (2012a) article in the New York Times on injuries in yoga, says that “Yoga is a combination of both physical and spiritual exercises, the key word being “combination” with an emphasis on the spiritual. Yoga is the practice of preparing oneself to yoke, unite or experience the Divine within (i.e., the individual self with the Cosmic Self)” (Shukla 2012). The brunt of her argument is that yoga is not just physical exercise but more significantly, “...a holistic and spiritual system of living that is essential to the understanding and practice of Hinduism” (Shukla 2012). She is especially critical of separating *asana* from its spiritual foundations (ibid.).

<sup>38</sup> Though it is interesting to see how scholars are used in this polemic, it is perhaps equally interesting to look at the engagement it triggers in the readers. The comment sections below the articles exemplify this. The same level of engagement is seen in the comments on Broad’s (2012a) article.



and influenced by European Gymnastics”. Scholars, themselves often practitioners, sometimes also enter this fray with normative statements on what practices “deserves” to be termed “yoga” (as mentioned and will be seen). According to Singleton and Byrne (2008) the question of “authenticity” is a central challenge in modern practice. They write:

The fault most commonly found with contemporary yoga, by both scholars and “informed” practitioners, is that it is *inauthentic* with regard to the Indian traditions it claims to transmit. In this view, many of yoga’s manifestations in the (post-) modern, transnational world are simply *phony*, insofar as they speciously claim affiliation with a more or less ill-defined “tradition” of yoga, while simultaneously masking their modern accretions and innovations. (Singleton & Byrne 2008: 4)

Thus, (regrettably) I cannot shy away completely from the topic of authenticity, since the debate on the authenticity of modern yoga is of importance even to some practitioners. Though, perhaps having different criteria, HAF, scholars and practitioners all strive for what *they* perceive as the “authentic yoga practice”. “Authenticity” and “being authentic” seems to have become badges of honour, not only in the yoga community, but also in general (Lindholm 2008). My task in this thesis, though, is not to evaluate whether modern yoga practice is “authentic” or not, that is whether or not it really is ancient religious discipline or “merely” adopted as a modern form of exercise. I will touch upon the question of “authenticity” at several times, but then mainly related to the students’ and other interested parties’ views of the matter.

In the following I will present Ashtanga yoga as practiced at KPJAYI in Mysore, which is also mainly how it is practiced worldwide, as the Shala is the only place where official permission to teach Pattabhi Jois’ method can be obtained. The focus will be mainly on the *asana* practice. Pattabhi Jois established Ashtanga yoga as it is taught today, and his shala is by most seen as *the* source of this style of yoga. Even people teaching Ashtanga yoga without having been in Mysore, mostly cater to this method, as they have been trained by people who have been. Even the authenticity of the Ashtanga yoga taught in the Shala today is sometimes being challenged, though, as we will see later on in this thesis. The controversy is usually not based on whether

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Ashtanga is authentic yoga<sup>39</sup>, but rather whether Ashtanga yoga as taught in the Shala today is authentic Ashtanga yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois. These challenges partly stem from the growing numbers of students, which have necessitated changes in teaching methods, as well as changes made to the sequence, and how postures are performed.

### 3.4 The practice

The Shri K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute is dedicated to the education of yoga practitioners. Practitioners should come with the sole purpose of studying the tradition from its source. Students traveling to Mysore should not come with the expectation of obtaining Authorized or Certified status. (KPJAYI)<sup>40</sup>

Although Ashtanga often is used to refer to the physical practice of *asana*, or postures, and especially Pattabhi Jois’ particular sequence of postures, his teaching also includes the seven other limbs of Ashtanga yoga. That being said, also other styles of yoga are denoted “ashtanga” to mark their connection to Patañjali’s lineage. In this text though, Ashtanga will refer to the practice established by Pattabhi Jois, if not otherwise stated. The postures are arranged in a set sequence dealt into six different series of increasing difficulty and subtlety.<sup>41</sup> All students start at the primary series and are given new postures according to their mastery of the previous ones. The first series consists of 15 standing postures, and 25 seated postures. When the whole of the primary series is mastered, the intermediate, or second, series is attached at the end of the first, and gradually expanded posture by posture. Often a teacher will look to certain “key postures” before allowing a student to move on. In the primary series two important *asana* are *marichyasana D* and *supta kurmasana*.<sup>42</sup> In both, “binding” is important, which here means being able to reach around the back and grab the hands. Before moving into the second series, many teachers will also demand that the

---

<sup>39</sup> As seen in Nanda’s (2011a, 2011b) articles, Ashtanga yoga is a central practice among the modern postural yogas, and as a part of “the tradition of the Mysore palace” (Sjoman 1999) the historical origins and “ideological” sources of the practice are being contested. These are mainly “external” debates, though, while the questions of authenticity that deal with changes in the Ashtanga system are more “internal” to the (Ashtanga) yoga community.

<sup>40</sup> <http://kpjayi.org/the-institute/teachers>

<sup>41</sup> See appendixes for the three first series.

<sup>42</sup> See appendix 2, page ix.

student is able to get up to a standing position from the bridge posture (*urdhva dhanurasana*).<sup>43</sup> In adding new postures to the sequence, the practice thus can evolve into the third series and so on. Although there are many students practicing parts or the whole of the first two series, fewer venture beyond the third. It is said that Sharath, Guruji's grandson, who is the current director of KP YA JI, is the only person to master the sixth and final series. All students, irrespectively of their accomplishment in *asana* begin their practice with the *suryianamaskara A* and *B*, or sun-salutations, usually 5 of the first and 3 (or 5) of the latter, and ends it with the "finishing sequence" consisting of the bridge posture, seated forward bend (*paschimattanasana*), shoulder stand (*salamba sarvangasana*), plow pose (*halasana*), ear press (*karnapidasana*), up-side-down lotus position (*urdhva padmasana*), fetus posture (*pindasana*), fish pose (*matsyasana*), straight legs (*uttana padasana*), head stand (*shirsasana*), and a lotus sequence.<sup>44</sup> Finally, they lay down to rest in the corpse posture (*shavasana*). Each pose throughout – except those in the finishing sequence, which are held longer, usually between eight and 25 breaths – is held for (at least) five breaths, although some also do eight. A central aspect of the practice is "flow" or *vinyasa*, which means that the movement should be closely tied to breath, and that there is continuous movements connecting each posture. Each posture has a certain *vinyasa* count telling the practitioner how (and when) to enter, hold, and exit each posture. This is also set.<sup>45</sup>

Ashtanga yoga is traditionally taught and practiced in two ways. First, there is led-class, where the teacher leads the class through the *asana* sequence, counting the *vinyasas* for every posture. All the students do the posture simultaneously. The teacher stops the students as they get to their last *asana*, and then everyone joins in at the finishing sequence. There are classes for led primary, and led intermediate. The

<sup>43</sup> This does not seem to always be too strictly practiced, though, as Saraswathi gave me *pasasana* and asked me to try to drop-back at the same time. She also gave me *krounchasana*, which is the second *asana* in the second series, even though I was still not able to get back up. It is rumoured that Saraswathi is much more generous, i.e., "softer", in handing out new *asanas* than Sharath. When I was back in Mysore in February 2011 I was given more *asanas* and practiced as far as *parsvadhanurasana*, even though I'm still just able to drop-back and not able to get up from backbend. See appendix 3, page xix.

<sup>44</sup> See appendix 4 page xxxi.

<sup>45</sup> This means that if you follow the prescribed pattern, there is a set number of *vinyasas*, that is "movement-breath" pairs, in each series, making it possible to know how many breaths you will take and how many moves you will make in advance of the practice (as long as you have decided how much of the series you are to do). See appendixes for *vinyasa* count.

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

second, perhaps most common, way of teaching – though there are usually one or two led classes a week at most studios (and some have only led classes) – is so-called “Mysore” style. In these classes, everybody does their own practice at their own pace. The teacher helps the students when needed, assists them, gives advice on how to get deeper in the postures and adjusts them. He or she also hands out new *asanas* to students when they are deemed ready. People finish their allotted *asana*, do the finishing sequence, rest in *shavasana* and go home. In Mysore, Sharath did led classes on Friday and Sunday, Saturday being a rest day, while Saraswathi, Jois’ daughter and Sharath’s mother, led classes on Friday and Saturday, letting her students rest on Sunday. For the remaining days the classes were Mysore style, and the term of course originated in Mysore.

In Mysore, there are additional chanting classes, which were made compulsory in 2011. These were held thrice a week, and consisted of learning some Sanskrit verses by heart. These verses were not expounded upon in any extent. Each Sunday, Sharath held a conference where he explained some chosen topic and answered questions from the students.

Twice a month, on the full and black moon, there is no practice. The Shala is closed, and the students can sleep in. The main cause given for these breaks is the fluctuation of energy that occurs with the waxing and waning of the moon. When getting closer to the full moon, the energy level rises, and it is harder to control yourself in the practice making you more prone to injuries as you push yourself harder. When the black moon is getting closer, the energy level decrease making you lethargic and heavy, which makes it harder to practice at all. So by the power of the moon, we are supposedly affected throughout our monthly practice. Many experience this force, and will be very vigorous in the days before the new moon, and very lazy in the days before the black. A Swedish girl said, partly joking, that when she starts working she will observe moon days. There are several theories why we are affected by the moon this way. Some said that it is like the tide, and that the moon works on the fluids in the spine, others talked about the energy and left it at that. Others were perhaps more sober, and claimed that the yogis of old found out that there was a need for more than one day of rest each week – Ashtanga is to be practiced six days a week, according to tradition – so they decided for two more holydays every month, choosing the moon

days for convenience as much as for anything else. The reason why some experience the difference in energy is that they expect to experience it, it is argued, which is kind of supported by the report that it is something people start experiencing after having practiced regularly every, or at least several, days a week (meaning that they have gone rather deeply into the practice) for an extended period of time. The reason might of course also be that their body are more finely tuned.

The moon day being an extra day off, the evening prior is often a time for staging parties and going out. There are “Moon day dance jams”, and charity arrangements are often laid to these evenings when people tend to stay up a bit longer.

This was but a brief introduction, and I will return to different aspects of the practice and how it is taught, throughout the thesis. The age we are living in was presented as a backdrop against which the adoption of a yoga practice can be seen. Such ways of understanding our day and age also influence the man on the street as stories of secularisation, and later the armament of religious differences are transmitted to the public by the media, though the images are often somewhat distorted. Such images of downfall and decline can foster quests for authenticity, and, though debated, yoga for many crops up as a road there.

In the next chapter, I will present Mysore as a social setting and the Ashtanga yoga community as a place where yoga students are socialized into the practice.

“Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## Part two: Practicing yoga

The late Sri K. Pattabhi Jois was often quoted as saying, "Do your practice, and all is coming." Simple wisdom. For yogis to know anything for sure, we must do it. Not argue about it, push it away or call it impossible, but actually engage in the practice and find out for ourselves. We'll never know if we can return to a headstand practice unless we try -- it may be first with six blocks and two teachers supporting us, but the minute we overcome our limitations, we've received the real gift of asana: knowing ourselves as unlimited. (Kaivalya 2012)

The practice of yoga, as a whole, is a profound science of internal purification which leads very gradually to the realization of the non-difference between the *jīvātma*, or indwelling Self of the individual, and the *paramātma*, or Universal Self. (Jois 2005: 7)

Individuals always dream of something more, always resist what is and fantasize about what might be, always seek the embodied miracle of ecstasy to overthrow the limitations of the ordinary. (Lindholm 2008: 144)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”



## 4: The social life of the Ashtanga community in Mysore, India

In this chapter, I will focus on some general conditions of the Ashtanga community, partly as a way of trying to delimit this style of yoga and the community apart from others. I will explore life in Mysore and the social scene that can be perceived to exist adjacent to the practice, but additionally is an important catalyst in unfolding a personal practice. This social scene is for some a major reason for travelling to India, and for others it is more of an annoyance or a disturbance. I will also look into what ties the Ashtanga yoga family together and the inner workings of this rather small and tight knit community. I will try to look into how social life in Mysore is established and upheld, as well as how it can influence the yoga practice. Though many of the yoga students seem to hold the social life in Mysore as separate from the practice itself, I will show how they are mutually dependent. This will establish a few markers for the rest of the thesis, and as such some of the things touched upon in this chapter will be dealt with in more detail later on. I will argue that yoga is not only a very personal and private practice, but also highly social, although this might not be equally recognized by the practitioners. It is not only the physical endeavour on the mat in the Shala that is important and formative in going to Mysore. Though the yoga practice and the personal experience thereof is the main motive in stories of yoga, the practice and the experience are highly influenced by the environment and the social milieu in which the practice is undertaken. These are fields of social resonance (Wikan 1992) where the practitioner gets the most immediate feedback on his or her practice, apart from the personal reflection upon it. Life evolves around the practice, and all that happens feeds back into the practice. Based on personal experience on the mat, one's own and others' actions and behaviour off the mat, and all that one sees, hears, and reads, each and every one tries to make sense of yoga and its impact on life.

Within this framework, experience and knowledge is embodied – this is the background against which figures emerge. In Mysore the practitioners learn how to recognize and make sense of their personal experience on the mat, and they learn the right language to convey this experience (in the right fashion). The physical experience can be “correctly” contextualized with the yoga philosophy, and observing

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

more experienced students, as well as the teachers and by feedback from these, both on their practice and their behaviour, they can learn to correctly be “Ashtanga yoga practitioners”. They are socialized into the world of Ashtanga yoga. The students are yoga “apprentices” (Lave 2001; Marchand 2008) and not only learn the skill of practicing yoga, but also *become* “yoga practitioners” as their identities are shaped. This, of course, happens everywhere Ashtanga yoga is practiced, but as Mysore and the Shala is where it all begun and the head teacher resides, practicing here takes precedence and has a special status as the source of the *correct* practice and knowledge. Coming here can elevate a student’s standing within the Ashtanga yoga community.

Mysore and the Shala are nodes (Glaeser 2006), where interaction takes place. At these locations the interaction between the different actors is messy, and characterised by negotiations, occasionally (more or less hidden) conflicts, and in general the exploration of the Ashtanga yoga practice. In other words, social life in Mysore can be characterised by “friction” (Tsing 2005). Mysore is where the Ashtanga family is renewed and continuously reenergized. Mysore and the Shala are stages where “Ashtanga yoga” is enacted (Mol 2002), notions are developed, realities embodied and not least people meet and talk. Some of the people at a node might be there to do yoga and others to do fieldwork – and some both – but all enter the same fray, none are left unscratched and we all scratch back. The Ashtanga family is a community of practice (Lave 1991; Marchand 2008), centred on the common practice of Ashtanga yoga, and the students as apprentices are socialised into the community by their participation. As they deepen their practice they internalise the values, knowledge and norms governing the practice, and they are shaped and gradually emerge as “aspiring yogis”, their identities and foundational dispositions – or habitus (Bourdieu 2007) – changing with their deepening commitment.

#### 4.1 Being in India, being in Mysore

India is a place where the senses get their due. Flavours are added, and in the case of India, let us not forget the smells (incense, urine, open sewers, jasmine, sweet, sweet chai, spices). There are also the sights (garlanded pink Ganeshas, monkeys, beggars, some of which are severely crippled, saris in every colour imaginable, fruits, trucks,

ragged busses coming at you at terrible speeds, never slowing down, slums and (just across the street) palaces), the sounds (car horns, backing cars, the cries of chai, coffee, pan, pineapples, mango), and the feelings (the scorching sun, fingered food, sandaled feet). You can forget yourself in such a place, but you might also become overtly aware of your own being – your visibility and your own self are tried and tested at every corner (in both good, not so good and rather bad ways).

It might not be too far fetched to claim that these aspiring yogis are travelling out and far away in order to get in (-to themselves), and undertake practices that are far removed from their usual ways and the traditions that their own home places have to offer. They are looking for themselves in places they have never before been. It is like looking for your car keys in London though you have never been there, but rather have lived your whole life in Paris.<sup>46</sup> A few of the future yogis have, in their own words, escaped from the West and its ego driven, all-surface-no-depth people and their sole concern for money (and career) and nothing else, to an India they perceive to hold answers they cannot find back home. Many end up spending time with other Westerners, who also to some degree might have spurned money, but who still have high ambitions for their practices, want to get the next posture, and be authorised – an incongruity that is not lost to all the students either.

In Mysore tales are told not only about chasing one's own tail around the globe, but much time is supposedly also spent chasing the tails of other yoga students. Though in India to undertake the rigorous practices of a religious philosophy preaching celibacy and abstinence (or at least fidelity and piety), many are not too deterred from the pleasures of the body. Mysore is a place for many pleasures, but also some pain, both emotionally and physically.

### **Any given day**

The alarm clock goes off at 0340 AM, and I get up right away knowing that if I wait just a little bit I will drift back to sleep. Without turning the light on I make my way to the bathroom. There I go to the toilet (yoga is best done on an empty stomach so I try

---

<sup>46</sup> This is not a perfect simile of course, since you always – or at least usually – come along when you travel.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

to take a shit), brush my teeth and wash my face in an attempt to really wake up. I head for the living room and get dressed, putting on my shorts, some pants and a shirt, before doing an easy, standing forward bend to get my body started a bit. My thighs feel stiff and short. Some mornings I make a small pot of coffee – as Guruji famously said at some point: “No coffee, no *prana*”<sup>47</sup> – but lately I have not bothered, selecting instead to sleep a few more minutes. Before going out I put on a woollen cap and the shawl, as mornings are rather cold even in these climates, and shoulder my yoga bag. At 0408 AM, I am on my way to the Shala, and as the cold clears my head somewhat, I start questioning myself: what am I doing here, getting up this early only to do all this hard work? I try to reason with myself that as soon as I get started it will not be that bad, and afterwards it will actually feel good. My body is starting to wake up too, and I try to gauge how the practice will be today. Are there any aches and pains? Do I feel heavy or energetic? The walk takes about 12 minutes. I have clocked it so as to know how long I can sleep. As I get closer to the Shala these thoughts slowly fade, and there is just the expectation of the practice to come. Today I will try to breathe better, and I will work more with *dristi*.<sup>48</sup> I will try to engage the muscles in my hips, and maybe that will help me get up from my backbend. The stray dogs greet me halfway down “Shala street”<sup>49</sup>, and they are happy to see me, since they still have not gotten that I am neither not too eager to pet them nor play. As usual, I am one of the first to get to the gate at the Shala, and Prakash has still not opened it. Since Sharath left the teaching to Saraswathi there are not too many in the 0430 timeslot, and those who are, are not that eager to be there to grab a spot as there is room for everybody. I say “Good morning” and “how are you?” to the usual faces and sit down at the stone rail outside the gate. When Prakash comes to the gate to let us in – at 0420 real time, which makes him a few minutes late according to Shala time – there are four of us, Charles, Stian, Liza and me. We say “good morning” to the sleepy eyed Prakash, go inside and roll out our mats in “our spots” and place our rolled up cotton rugs (often called “Mysore rugs”) at the end of them, ready to roll out when we get to the seated

---

<sup>47</sup> Meaning: “If you do not drink coffee, you will have no energy (*prana*).” Coffee and exercise were recently the topics of an article in the Norwegian newspaper “Adressa”, where the energizing effect to some degree was confirmed: <http://www.adressa.no/sport/sprek/article6403605.ece> (Accessed: October 4th, 2012.)

<sup>48</sup> *Dristi* is gaze, and every *asana* has a prescribed focus point. A focused gaze keeps the mind from wandering, according to Ashtanga practitioners (e.g., Jois 2002; Miele 2007; Räisänen 2005; Swenson 1999). *Dristi* is an essential part of the practice.

<sup>49</sup> The street’s real name is 8th Cross, but among the students at KPJAYI it just goes by “Shala Street” or “Shala Road”

sequence. Since we are so few at this time in the morning, we can choose where to stand and have gotten the habit of going to the same spots every morning. I am in last row on the huge rugs that cover most of the floor, a bit to the left. There are three or four spots to the left of me and eight to eleven to the right depending on how tightly people are crammed into the room – for led class on Fridays and Sundays the room is packed. Having rolled out my mat, I go to the changing room to undress. Back on the mat I close my eyes, try to activate *mula bandha*<sup>50</sup> and *uddiyana bandha*, and start breathing with *udjjayi*<sup>51</sup> breath, slightly contracting the throat and making a hoarse sound as I breathe through my nose. People slowly keep trickling in, rolling out their mats. The sound of breathing starts filling the room. I silently chant the opening mantra to tune my focus to the practice at hand:

Ommmmmm. Vande Guruman charanaravinde / Sandarshita svatmasukavabodhe / Nishreyase jangalikayamane / Samsara halahala mohashantyai /<sup>52</sup> abaho, purushakaram, chankarachakrasi darinam, sahasra, chirasam, svetam, pranamami Patanjalin. Ooooooooooooo.

I inhale and raise my hands above my head, palms together, looking at my thumbs. Exhaling I bend forward, back straight, hands to the floor, my forehead touching my knees, I can feel the stiffness of my hamstrings, knowing they will loosen up as I move on through the series. Inhaling I lift my head and look forward between my

<sup>50</sup> The *bandhas* are according to authorities of yoga, “energy locks.” Activating the *mula bandha* (the root lock) keeps the energy from escaping downwards, and lifts it upwards. Though there is certain debate about the finer details of activating it, the “simplest” explanation is contraction of the anus and lifting it slightly towards the bellybutton. The *uddiyana bandha* (meaning “lifting upwards”) lifts the energy further up, and is activating by contracting the point two fingers below the navel slightly in and upwards. The muscles in the abdomen are pulled towards the spine. How hard the contraction ought to be is again debated. These two locks are to be activated at all times throughout the practice. There is a third lock, called *jalandhara bandha* (“throat lock”), which is not activated throughout the practice. This lock locks the energy within the body, and is activated by extending the neck and pressing the chin down between the collarbones. (For more on the *bandhas* see Buddhananda 1978; Jois 2002; Miele 2007; Räisänen 2005; Swenson 1999.)

<sup>51</sup> *Udjayi* breathing is done by slightly contracting and breathing at “the back” of the throat “with friction”, making a hoarse sound (as when almost snoring just before falling asleep). The sound helps the practitioner keep his or her focus. It is also said to cool down the body if too hot, and warm it up if too cold. It is also energetic. (e.g., Jois 2002; Miele 2007; Räisänen 2005; Swenson 1999.)

<sup>52</sup> Translation of first half from “Yoga Mala”: “I worship at the Guru’s lotus feet/Awakening the happiness of the Self revealed/Beyond comparison, acting like the jungle physician/To pacify delusion from the poison of existence” (Jois 2002).

Translation of the whole mantra from [http://www.ashtangaworkshop.com/ashtanga\\_chants.php](http://www.ashtangaworkshop.com/ashtanga_chants.php) (Viewed June 15th 2012): “I bow to the lotus feet of the Supreme Guru/which awaken insight into the happiness of pure Being,/which are the refuge, the jungle physician,/which eliminate the delusion caused by the poisonous herb of Samsara (conditioned existence)/I prostrate before the sage Patañjali/who has thousands of radiant, white heads (as the divine serpent, Ananta)/and who has, as far as his arms, assumed the form of a man/holding a conch shell (divine sound), a wheel (discus of light or infinite time) and a sword (discrimination).” See also Miele (2007), and appendix 1, page iii.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

eyebrows. Exhaling I jump back to the plank position. I inhale and lift my chest, arms straight, back bent, resting on the wrists of the feet, toes pointing backward. Exhaling I roll over the toes and lift the buttock into downward dog – *adho mukha svanasana*. Legs, arms and back straight, and lifting the buttocks towards the ceiling, I try to look like an inversed V, holding the posture for five breaths, inhaling and exhaling. On an exhalation I look forward between my hands, bend my knees slightly, and inhaling I jump forward, landing with my feet between my hands. I straighten my legs, and my back looking forward. Exhaling I bend forward, torso hanging down. Inhaling I come all the way up with my back straight, lift my hands above my head, and look up at my thumbs. Exhaling I let my arms come down to rest at the side of the body. Inhaling I start repeating the sequence *suryanamaskar A*.<sup>53</sup>

At 0500, the elevator starts humming and a moment later Saraswathi<sup>54</sup> enters the office. She does her chanting and drinks a bit of tea before she enters the Shala. At that point everybody stops what they are doing, and with folded hands and bowed heads we all chant the opening mantra together in a call-repeat patten. Saraswathi chants a few syllables, and we answer, going through the whole mantra. With the chanting, we are saying our thanks to Patañjali and the gurus who have passed down the practice so that we can experience its benefits. It is a way of cleansing the energy in the room we are practicing, and preparing the mind, body and emotions for the task at hand, according to philosophy of the practice.<sup>55</sup> Afterwards, we pick up where we left off.

After a short while, the heat and moisture is prevalent. The condensation runs down the walls and windows, some days dripping from the ceiling, a haze in the room. Sounds and noises are creeping in from outside – the Hare Krishnas chanting as they make their way past, Gokulam slowly waking up as we make our way through the practice. Sometime around 0600 AM, I have done the bridge posture (*urdhva dhanurasana*)<sup>56</sup>, and have yet again failed to get up from my backbend. Saraswathi has helped me come up, with the dips, as well as with the forward bend that is

---

<sup>53</sup> See appendix 1 page ii for *suryanamaskar* sequence and page iv for *vinyasa* count.

<sup>54</sup> From January throughout March 2009 Sharath was teaching in the main Shala, but when he left for his tour, Saraswathi took his position and did all the teaching.

<sup>55</sup> [http://www.ashtangaworkshop.com/ashtanga\\_chants.php](http://www.ashtangaworkshop.com/ashtanga_chants.php)

<sup>56</sup> Appendix page iii for finishing sequence, and xvii for *vinyasa* count *urdhva dhanurasana*. Page xxx for *vinyasa* count finishing sequence.

supposed to balance the body after all the backbending. Saraswathi calls out “another one!” I fold my mat and drenched in sweat, head to the changing room for the finishing sequence, giving up my space for whoever is waiting in line. I do the shoulder stand sequence, the fish poses, and headstand, before finishing my practice with the lotus sequence. My knees hurt so I modify the lotus to only sitting cross-legged, carefully folding the washcloth behind the knee to not overstrain it. Afterwards I lay down in the corpse pose (*shavasana*) and try to get down from the practice. My heart is beating fast from the lotus lift (*uthpluthi*), and my breath is a tad ragged. As I lie on the mat, I slowly calm down, my body feeling heavy and incredibly light at the same time. After 10-15 minutes, I slowly get up, take off my drenched shorts, dress, pack my mat and say my thanks to Saraswathi by putting my palms together and bowing my head to her on my way out. All the while I am hoping the coconut guy has arrived outside. The clock is somewhere around 0620 AM real time, and I am feeling drained and blissfully tired from the practice.

The coconut guy is a lifesaver, and after finishing my third coconut, I head home feeling rather good. Mysore is waking up, and the sun has just risen. I am really looking forward to a shower and some coffee now. Slowly, I make my way home, walking up “Shala Street”, crossing the field and heading towards Contour road. At home, Elin has started her practice. She starts at 0600, stealing about one and a half hour more of sleep than me. I shower, make some coffee and write my field diary, and some notes of today’s practice, trying to recall whether there were any particular feeling or “achievements” during my time on the mat. I adjust Elin in some poses, drink my coffee and start feeling hungry. While Elin showers I make breakfast – oats with fruit and coffee. Having eaten at about 0830 we are already well into the day. This was the usual start of any given day in Mysore, with only a few variations, such as led classes, Saturdays and moon days.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

#### 4.2 Social life in Mysore

The transient quality is a prevalent aspect of social life in Mysore. People come, stay for a month or two or three (some less or a few more)<sup>57</sup> and then leave. As people arrive in Mysore and start practicing at different times, you find yourself getting to know people, and suddenly they are leaving. Despite this, the social scene in Gokulam is rather small and closed. People tend to come back year after year, and gravitating around the practice in the Shala most become if not friends, at least a familiar face. Thus, though individual members of the Mysore yoga community are unceasingly being exchanged from month to month, the community itself is independent of any single member, and therefore, it is continuous and “constant”. Everybody is there for the same reason: practicing yoga. Staying in Mysore is relaxing because there are many equal-minded people. Of her friends in New York, Mandy said: “None of my friends do yoga, so we are not really that close. They are all from high school. Except one: my best friend from high school. She does yoga. We’re in the same shala.”

Because of this it did not bother her so much that she was moving to Switzerland to teach and not going back to New York. Having been in Mysore many times, she has friends all over the world. As such, the Mysore community also stretches well beyond this small Indian town.

Information is widely shared and can, I will argue, be seen as a sign of a kind of *communitas* (Turner 1997) within this community, which can be seen as a *community of practice* (Lave 1991, Marchand 2008). Knowledge of yoga, Mysore, India and skills such as language, playing an instrument and *henna* painting just to mention a few, are shared. People help one another, skills or knowledge are taught, and “body work” such as massage is done, sometimes for being taught something else in return. Books and tips on the best restaurant and how to do a backbend are circulated without necessarily expecting anything in return. Being the “depositor” of such knowledge brings certain status and position. As will be shown later, both formal and informal status, i.e., rights and obligations, and rank within the Ashtanga family depend on

---

<sup>57</sup> A new rule at the Shala now is that you can only practice up to three months at a time, while it used to be six. The minimum stay is still one month. Practicing with Saraswathi has usually been less strict as to the length of stay, with some coming to practice only a few days.



general conduct. The requirements for ascendancy to higher standings are negotiable and ambiguous, as are partly the accompanying rights and obligations.

These are just a few of the basic conditions of social life in Mysore, in the continuation I will go deeper into the characteristics, and sketch out what they entail for the yoga practitioners. The students themselves are fairly preoccupied with the connection between the social life and the yoga practice itself. First I will mention a few important places in Gokulam.

### Landmarks

Apart from the aforementioned Sri Chakra House, Barista and Om/Anokhi's, there are other important places in the social life of the yoga students, such as Santosha, Anu's, and Guru's<sup>58</sup> coconut stand.

Apart from Om<sup>59</sup>, Santosha is a popular place for breakfast. Santosha is situated close to the Shala, and behind its rather incognito façade there is usually bustling life in the morning when the yoga students come in for breakfast. You can either walk around the house to the back where there is a small backyard crowded with two large tables under an awning, or go inside, where there directly from the back is a kitchen and a small "waiting area." Passing through this you get to the seating area. The seating area inside is a larger room with two big low tables and cushions and thin mattresses to sit on. Santosha is open every day, except Saturdays, from 0800 AM until 1200 noon. When we did not eat breakfast at home, we usually went to Om or Santosha. Both are run by foreigners, cater mostly to yoga students and serve Western breakfast like omelettes, porridge, toast and muesli. Having actually done the only set part of the day, a breakfast at one of these places easily last for two-three hours if nothing else is planned, and for some it includes both second and third breakfast. These are also the places to go for real coffee. For many, breakfast is the great social event of the day.

---

<sup>58</sup> Not to be confused with Guruji.

<sup>59</sup> Presented in chapter 2 page 19.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Guru’s coconut stand is an important meeting point in Gokulam. There are several stands selling coconuts in Gokulam, but *the* coconut stand is the one at the crossing of Contour Road and 1<sup>st</sup> Main where Guru and his sons sell coconuts, chai, *bidis*<sup>60</sup> and cigarettes to Indians and yoga students alike. The yoga students go there after practice, use it as a meeting place (since it is located “in the middle” of Gokulam and “everybody” knows where it is), or just hang out there and chat. Guru himself is a popular character in yoga circles and when he became ill, some students arranged a charity event at Santosha to collect money for his treatment. Among other things T-Shirts with Guru’s autograph were auctioned. For newcomers the coconut stand is a great place to meet people and get information on life in the Shala, Gokulam, Mysore and India in general. It is also the place to go for the last gossip, be it of what is happening in the Shala or in Mysore. Apart from helping their father at the stand, Guru’s sons, work at some of the breakfast places. There are always people there – especially in the peak season. In summer (May), when it gets hot, it slows down a bit.

Anu’s is another important place for yoga students in Mysore. At Anu’s, there is Internet access, – both computers and Wi-Fi – they serve lunch and dinner every weekday except Thursday and they have the best smoothies in town. Ganesh, who runs the place, can also help to organize transport and find accommodations. At the rooftop, where the food is served, there are low tables, pillows and mattresses.

All these places, as well as the Shala, are located in Gokulam, a neighbourhood to the Northeast of downtown Mysore. This is not an exhaustive list of yoga student hangouts. There are several restaurants, cafes and other locations, where they spend their time, but the ones listed are popular places.

### 4.3 Pride and prejudice: The Mysore social scene<sup>61</sup>

I met Hans in June 2009 at Anu’s. He had been in Mysore 3 or 4 weeks, but did not practice in the Shala, but rather at Alex’ place. He told me that he never travelled to Mysore in the peak season between January and March. To him the early morning crush at the gate to get into the Shala and grab a spot was a low point. “This is such a

---

<sup>60</sup> Thin Indian cigarettes where the tobacco is rolled in a leaf and tied with string.

<sup>61</sup> For other depiction of the social scene in Mysore see Edge 2006, Reed 2012 and Zutshi 2012.

scene, and people are so eager to be someone,” he said, and continued: “The Shala is a place where people can try to be someone, to prove themselves.” On the other hand, coming to Mysore acts as a transition for a lot of people, and although he would never come at the most popular times, he still said that Mysore was the stable part of his life. He has been in Mysore between 2 and 6 months every year the last six years, and in between he has been some many different places, for instance in the US and 2 years in Thailand. He could not picture himself not coming, although, as he puts it: “It has to stop at some point.” But before that happens, something else has to come to fill Mysore’s place, though he does not know yet what that something could be.<sup>62</sup>

Although yoga is often claimed to be suitable for everyone, regardless of creed, sex, age, “race”, economic background, etc., most practitioners are – according to themselves, and in accordance with my own observations, stereotypically – from a white middle-class background. It also takes a bit of strong-headedness to dedicate your time to something that is not quite mainstream among the “broad masses”. You are not necessarily exposed to yoga, and especially the philosophy thereof, unless you are willing and able to go a bit outside of the main venues of physical exercise. Many Ashtanga practitioners still hold that especially Ashtanga takes a particular dedication. My impression is that the popular “understanding”, especially in countries like Norway, is still shallow, with vivid images of hippies or middle-aged women in mind. Mulling over what kind of people practice Ashtanga in Mysore, Jennifer, a New Yorker, who has practiced Ashtanga for only six months, but who has taught Iyengar for some years, thinks along these lines:

I mean I think there are certain characteristics someone who’s going to do any daily practice religiously would need to possess. (...) Yeah, I mean, some of this gets a little tricky and my first thought was, I don’t think many poor people are practicing Ashtanga in Mysore. Well because you need a lot of money to pay at the Shala, and have the luxury of not working in your life and coming to India, so then that’s like, are we just talking about people who are practicing Ashtanga in Mysore, or are we just talking about people who are practicing Ashtanga anywhere, or are we just talking about people who are practicing yoga, because most people who have the money to hire childcare while they go to their yoga class and pay for a yoga class and buy lululemon<sup>63</sup> clothes and whatever... and probably have a cleaning

---

<sup>62</sup> 072214062009

<sup>63</sup> A famous brand of yoga apparel.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

lady and that’s why they have the free time to not be at home, I mean, it’s definitely reflective of a certain economic bracket.

Though she thinks there are certain characteristics to those who practice yoga “religiously”, Jennifer at first struggles a bit to classify “Ashtanga practitioners”. She realizes that, even though yoga ideally should not be restricted to those of a certain financial bracket, yoga studios are quite expensive – more so than the average gym or fitness centre – and to travel to India for months on end, and especially in order to practice at KPJAYI which is twice or trice as expensive as other shalas in Mysore, you need both money and time. Even buying yoga clothing can be expensive. Turning more to the life situation of Ashtanga practitioners in Mysore, she muses:

I think most people here are fairly educated, and you need a pretty luxurious life, with a lot of freedom. And that’s an interesting point, because like often people will say, we have so much freedom, we have so much choice, in our life as modern Westerners. Who you’re gonna marry, how you wanna dress, what music, whatever, where you wanna live even, you can live in any country, you could do any job, it’s not like your dad was a cobbler so you’re a cobbler. And a lot of people given that overwhelming choice and freedom want it to be narrowed for them. I hear people, my friends, myself all the time, being like \*sharp intake of breath\* freedom and choice are a wonderful gift, but they’re also a touch of a burden, like simplicity sounds kind of good. And so, maybe it is an educated, privileged, the-world-is-your-oyster population, wanting someone to be like “you do this, now”. Kind of be restrained and make things simpler, like these are the poses you do every day, and this is it.

So though people coming to Mysore are well educated, with a lot of freedom to choose whatever they want in life, this freedom can be a burden that makes them chose a restricting practice. Being forced to choose what they are going to do in life, they choose to let others make decisions for them, at least in their yoga practice, which as I will show in Chapter 6 extends beyond the yoga mat. As they live in a world with seemingly endless opportunity – and thus much pressure – to choose, choosing to give away some of their freedom makes life simpler. It might also be a way of narrowing down the range of choice in other aspects of life, since dedicated Ashtanga practice takes commitment.

Asked whether it is possible to characterize Ashtanga practitioners, and people who travel to India to practice yoga, Martin, an English student who has practiced for ten

years, has been to Mysore four times, and has just been authorised to teach, had a slightly different take on things. Most Ashtanga practitioners are, according to him, a certain kind of compulsive person, who were wild teenagers and who now divert their energy elsewhere. When I admitted to having led a rather ordinary life, he exclaimed:

I'm amazed by that! You know, like when I was in my teens and twenties, all I wanted to do was get fucked up, and have fun. Doing anything seriously was not... It just wasn't me! I got absolute respect for people that have managed to miss out that destructive stage, but for me it was very necessary. It [Ashtanga] does seem to attract people who are compulsive for one reason or another. You know, I think, that it's like when I... As I first tried it, even that first day, it was so incredibly difficult for me, and I just wanted to be good in it. Right from the word go, it's like, I want to be able to do this. And looking at this, as I said this slim girl who could do anything with her body, and like; "Oh god, look at the mess I'm in," you know. And there's still a desire, I wanna be good at this thing, you know. I didn't realise how difficult it would be to be good at this thing, and I didn't realise that the goal posts would be constantly shifting. What seemed good then is just, you know... just to finish half primary reasonably was the goal, and then just to finish primary, and then to drop back, and then to stand up, and then to do second, and then...

Finding the practice extremely difficult, Martin, at once, felt the urge to master it. And as the goals for the practice are ever shifting, with ever-new postures, and other aspects of the practice lining up as he advances, new difficulties still instil this wish to be good at "this thing" as he puts it. He says the practice attracts certain compulsive people. Most would state that there were a wide variety of people and personalities present in the Shala, and that they all do very different things apart from the practice. Pressed a bit further quite a few would name the dedication to the practice and discipline as common denominators for those coming to practice in Mysore. It takes a lot of discipline to get up that early every morning, and to kind of rearrange your life around the practice, they would argue. Many, only half jokingly, said that Ashtanga attracts a lot of "Type A personalities". Such people are dedicated and willing to sacrifice a lot for their selected cause. They are able to fully embrace the rigorous regime of the Ashtanga practice. They are competitive, ambitious, tightly wound, high-achievers, impatient, and controlling workaholics. Many I have met fit – according to both themselves and others – easily within such a category, being a bit "anal" and narrow minded, doing the practice, getting fit, discussing asana etc., and just getting "down to business". This of course has implications for life in Mysore.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Yoga practitioners and others who are into alternative lifestyles sometimes view themselves as a kind of enlightened elite. They are a spiritual elite, who by example or persuasion can lead others onto the righteous path. The yogi to be is on a path of physical betterment, purity and transcendence that is for the enlightened few. The yoga student has (in his or her own eyes) found the true path to happiness, or whatever else is sought, and this path takes the diligent student further beyond the masses. There is among yoga practitioners some of the same sense that Lindholm (2008) describes as prevalent among edgeworkers, e.g., parachutists, climbers etc. He writes:

... like other religious virtuosos, edgeworkers generally feel something like contempt for lesser mortals who cannot live up to their high standards, that is, those who are overweight, soft, inept, and, worst of all, concerned about their safety and comfort. (2008: 50)

This is also similar to Turner’s (1997) observation of the hippies. There is among yoga practitioners, though, like among many religious virtuosos, also a sense of compassion towards those who have not yet found the way, and many genuinely want others to have the sense of meaning and belonging that they have found. On the other hand, like both edgeworkers, who are often seen as being plain selfish or even having a death-wish, and religious virtuoso, who are seen as mindless drones not able to think and chose for themselves, aspiring yogis do sometimes feel misunderstood and that people look at them slightly askance. This might heighten the feeling of superiority, as “other people” do not know what they are talking about since they have no experience of the practice.

In addition to being economically privileged,<sup>64</sup> there are thus undercurrents of moral and intellectual superiority. It can be argued that all this lends an elitist shine to yoga. Compared with non-practitioners and practitioners of other styles of yoga alike, ashtangis have found *the* way. There is pride in being part of a group that is not a part of the mainstream and in doing the most physically demanding style of yoga. As is being said: The Ashtanga community or family is quite small. The practice makes you

---

<sup>64</sup> Though, as Jennifer points out, not many poor people practice yoga, at least not in Gokulam, experience indicates that few yoga practitioners market themselves as economically privileged, instead underscoring the universality of the practice.

fit and the yoga philosophy (which is of course not exclusive to Ashtanga) is the secret knowledge to how to lead a better life. In the “ashtangis’” descriptions of themselves, they show a certain pride in being different from other yoga practitioners.

Coming to the “source” of Ashtanga to be a part of the lineage are among the main reasons quoted for travelling to Mysore. One person, nevertheless, told me that there are other reasons. If yoga had been the only goal, he would rather have gone to Hawaii or New York, where there are equally good, if not better teachers of Ashtanga yoga. These teachers are old-timers, with close ties to Mysore and Pattabhi Jois, and they teach *real* Ashtanga. At the same time they have a better understanding of the Western body and the Western way of practicing. There would be much more adjustments, one-on-one teaching, and perhaps also faster progression through the *asana*. The problem with going to Hawaii or New York is that it costs much more than staying and practicing in Mysore. Such viewpoints were echoed by a few. Others told me that their practice at home were longer than the practice Sharath allowed them to do, and some gossiped about people who, having been told by Sharath or Saraswathi to go the finishing *asana*, actually went home and continued the practice. Others would listen to and do what Sharath told them while they were less inclined to listen to Saraswathi. This was partly explained by the fact that she stopped practicing years ago, and thus does not have the same experience of the *asana*. Such gossip was often followed with exclamations like: “Why are they here, in the Shala, if they don’t want to listen and do what they are told?”<sup>65</sup>

These are differences which make a difference (Bateson 2000d). Not all agree about what is the best method of practicing Ashtanga. Drawing these boundaries – both within and around the Ashtanga yoga community – are central elements in establishing, upholding and negotiating both yoga as a practice and the Ashtanga community. Boundary maintenance is central to any “identity project” (Barth 1969). Both the personal and the social significance of the practice are influenced by these negotiations, and the issues will run through most of the topics of this thesis. Having sketched out some characteristics of the Ashtanga practitioners as seen by the

---

<sup>65</sup> I think this was done and said when Saraswathi ran the Shala, and that part of the reason people were upset over this lack of respect, was that it exploited Saraswathi’s kindness, and it showed that some students did not respect her authority.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

practitioners themselves, as well some of the conflict lines in yoga, I will now turn more explicitly to the community they make up and some of the negotiations and delimitations that takes place within it.

#### 4.4 The Ashtanga family: “Putting people in context.”

At Om Henrietta and Conrad talked about the moon-party on Tuesday. It had seemingly been rather wild, and people had eaten “space cookies” (e.g., cookies with cannabis) and mescaline (but in very small doses according to Conrad). Conrad asked: “Was Alf trippin’? He was acting kind of weird...” To which Henrietta answered: “A lot of people seemed to be...” Conrad thought that only about 7 or 8 people had actually been doing drugs, and asked whether Henrietta had done any mescaline. She replied: “Inadvertently... I was in the kitchen and suddenly.... It was in the cake...” Conrad: “No... There was weed in the cake!” Henrietta correcting him: “There was weed in *one* of the cakes...” Conrad said that he had just eaten a bunch of space cakes. Both had been in bed by four, and Conrad said: “I was up early though, I didn’t want to mess up my rhythm.” Conrad continued by saying that he really liked his timeslot and that he did not want to get “bummed up”.<sup>66</sup> He continued: “The only thing I don’t like is that Sharath leaves before my backbending... Although she [Saraswathi] is good too. He takes me deeper, but she makes me walk more.”<sup>67</sup>

This represents an early morning breakfast conversation in Mysore, conversant jumping from the last party to the students’ timeslots and their preferences in teachers. This particular conversation illustrates both extraordinary aspects of the social life, and the everyday practice and how it kind of creeps into every aspect of the social life. Even after a party, Conrad gets up early so as not to mess up his schedule.

Not all conversations are as intimate as this one, though. On meeting new people in Mysore, conversations are often shallower and rather recurrent. Most set out to find out where people are from and who they practice with. On commenting on this way of establishing a lineage, as someone put it, Martin said:

---

<sup>66</sup> i.e., get an earlier timeslot in the Shala, which is like a promotion of sorts as those who have been in the Shala the longest gets the earliest times.

<sup>67</sup> 171712032009



Yeah. It's also putting people in a context. It's just something to talk about, isn't it? I mean, I don't care who you practice with, I presume you practice with somebody, or you wouldn't have learned what you've learned, but it doesn't matter whom in fact. Although, if it is a friend of mine that would have been great, cause then we got something in common. For me it's in that area really. I don't think it's necessarily like competitive exactly. It's just establishing a common thread, I think.

Me: And the Ashtanga family is quite small so you're kind of bound to know someone who knows somebody.

Martin: Yeah, it's two or three degrees of separation. Every time. Definitely you know somebody I know. Yeah, I mean, it's nice to have this community, isn't it. It's nice to come back here every year, and some familiar faces there and some new faces, and you make new friends and it's wonderful to me.

Such questions then, are about establishing common threads. Calling the Ashtanga community “a family”, as is done, is rather apt, and both “family” and “community” say something about how they view their fellowship, and not least about how they want the social relations in Ashtanga yoga to be. The “community” is, and should be, small scale, rather lucid, tight-knit, and characterised by close social ties – especially in Mysore. The questions become a way of establishing lineage and kinship within the community, and there are usually few degrees of separation between any given individuals, as Martin points out. Being a family entails belonging, and as this is a chosen family, these people by their practice and social relations have chosen to pool their interests and be together. It can also be seen as a show of confidence and reliance. This bears some resemblance to the way certain New Age groups compare their communities to “tribes”, adopting the image of Indigenous people (Prince and Riches 1999). As the yoga students gather around the practice of Ashtanga yoga, it can also be interpreted as a community of practice (Lave 1991, Marchand 2008), and though being founded on common practices, these are also somewhat hierarchical.

Martin is enthusiastic about the whole social scene in Mysore. As someone who has been there a few times, he knows how to duck in and out of it. At the time of the interview I had been in Mysore approximately two months and found the socializing a bit tiresome. Commenting on this, Martin said:

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Ah... Well... A lot of people who have been a few times say that they kind of hate it and they don't want anything to do with it, and stuff like that. I understand that. I like to be able to dip in and out of it. I mean, I love to be able to spend time on my own. And I love to socialise. So I really like it, I mean, I *really* like it. I like the fact that, as opposed to a social scene anywhere else in the world, we're in good company, we're in company that... We're all in the same ting. You don't have to explain to your friend: “I can't meet you for dinner at nine pm, I can't go and see a show, I mean, I can't go to a night club. I got to get up.” It's just a given that we're all in this together, and yet there is still all this different, interesting, cool people with varied interests and people still love music, they just can't go to a late show, you know. So I love it. I really love it, yeah. I mean, not all the time, and I very rarely come to breakfast and stuff like that, but I do like to dip in and out of it. Just that that is available is great for me.

Martin knows how to spend his time. The fact that “everybody” coming to Mysore has the same foundation in the practice represents some kind of freedom for him since he does not have to explain his ways. The early practice is the given aspect of being in Mysore, the one component that everything else evolves around. Martin keeps a bit to himself, but he really enjoys having the social aspects available.

During my interview with Cherry from Canada, a former marathon runner, and now a yoga teacher in her early forties, these introductory conversations also came up, and it is clear that after a while the repetitions become tiresome:

I just need some time to be alone. Cause it's just too much. And you go for breakfast, and you hear the same story, and it's the same Indian conversation, like: “Where are you from?” “Where do you practice?” “How long are you here?” “When are you going home?” and I'm like, I just... Sometimes I just don't wanna hear it and it's funny because last year when I was here, when I just started my second month new people would come, and they'd be like... you just look at them and they're like... and it's hot, and you're like “I'm tired”. I don't have that kind of enthusiasm. And I'm not being critical, as I said I'm so thankful, but I can be thankful and spend my time at home. So I don't actually do a lot.

In this case, the sociability, rather than a positive thing is seen as a distraction. The social life becomes noise that steals focus from the true reason for going to Mysore. As Martin implies above, quite a few tend to withdraw from much of the social happenings when they have been in Mysore for a while, or have come back many times. Withdrawing as such can be seen as way of prioritizing the practice, and can

become a badge of honour. This is illustrated by a situation at Santosha one morning in August 2009. Lewis and I were at a table and were joined by Andrew, who had been in Mysore only three weeks. Andrew was very talkative, asking us where we came from and how long we had been in town, i.e., the usual stuff. At first Lewis just answered that he was “From here...” Then he let on that he is from England, and that he had been in Mysore for five months. He added: “It’s obvious that you haven’t been here long. You are so eager to meet people. When you have been here a long time, you just \*pft\* don’t bother!” It was very clear that he was not too eager to be in the conversation, but at the same time, he made a point of having been in Mysore for an extended period of time. There is, as such, certain frustration with what is seen as shallow people and conversations, and some links this to what is interpreted as an American way of being. Americans, especially as opposed to Northern Europeans, are presented as very easy to meet and get in touch with, but they tend to be overtly friendly, and are, thus, seen as shallow. Europeans, on the other hand, are perhaps not the most talkative at the outset, but, on the other hand, they tend to be more “loyal”. Both Americans and Europeans voice these opinions.

Anna, a Swedish yoga student and teacher in her forties, who in 2009 was in Mysore on her second trip, experiences the American dominated social scene as distracting, and she questions why people decide to come to Mysore. This became a topic when I interviewed her, as well as on other occasions. I asked her whether there, in her experience, were many who felt, like her, that the Mysore community is a bit too tightly knit and marred by gossip. She said:

Absolutely. And... It might be that there are... Or that it becomes... less so as in time, if you have been here a lot, if you have been here 10 years or... They might be more relaxed, I don’t know. I have a feeling that it might be when there are many that are new [here], and... That it becomes more like that then. Last time I was here, I was here with someone I know, who has been here a lot. They were kind of quite anti-social. You do your own thing. You’re here to do your practice and then you might need to step back a bit, and so... I found that quite nice. But, yeah, then there’s a difference, I think, what kind of [circles] you end up in... when you’re here and what kind of people are here and... If there are a lot of Americans or if there are... That is, if there is a bit an age-span. But there is also something that becomes double, because I want to travel here, and then at the same time, I find that [the social scene] a bit hard.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

On being asked what she perceived to be people’s reasons for travelling to Mysore, she answered:

To me it seems just to be... Just to be allowed to be where the source is. For many. The ones I know, in any case. That it is fun... Fun with Sharath. They like Sharath, or liked Guruji, a lot. But then again... Almost everybody are teachers, and then you think you should go. It has become much easier, so now everybody that are teachers want to go. Before, the main teachers went, and then they had kind of a monopoly in knowing how it was, and could go home and tell. I think it is a way for all of us who are new teachers to, how should I put this... I feel this way, and I have several friends who feel this way, that I want to feel that Sharath is my teacher as well. It’s a kind of declaration of independence. [My translation from Swedish]

Therefore, though Anna is not too happy about every aspect of the Mysore social life, she wants to come. As she points out, the social scene is very much influenced by who and how many come to Mysore at any point of time. Importantly she also sees coming to Mysore and practicing in the Shala as a declaration of independence. She is establishing her own connection to Sharath. She establishes a direct link to the source of Ashtanga yoga, and thus increases her own authority as a teacher. Anna and others do not want to be reliant upon their teachers to tell them how the practice is really done in Mysore. Having been there, they are free to tell their own students about the “Mysore practice”. They become carriers of what they see as the true practice, which is how it is done at the source in Mysore.

As in most families, there are conflicts in the Ashtanga family. One particular Sunday morning before led class, I noticed John moving from the first row, where he had been standing besides Marcus, onto the stage. At Marcus’s left side was Alf. When Sharath came in he told John that there were not enough space on stage and he had to move back onto the floor. At the coconut stand after practice, Alf exclaimed: “I acted so unyogic today!” He had totally lost it, and told someone off. Following the conversation I understood that Marcus in the very packed Shala had unfolded his yoga mat partly on top of Alf’s mat, and that John in his kind ways had moved onto the stage to make room for the other two. In conversation with Cherry, Alf continued:

Alf: I’m feeling so unyogic, I’m so unyogic today. I had a fit before practice. That guy [Marcus] is just so...

Cherry: I know exactly what you mean. I had the same experience on Friday. He folded out his Mysore rug on top of my mat. And I'm a big broad, I can't jump back like this \*holding her hand close together, thumbs almost touching\* And we bump into each other occasionally....

Alf: John is a nice enough guy, but that guy, he just doesn't give a fuck. And he's a blubber [meaning sweats and sprays].

Cherry: I can totally relate to that because that was my initial reaction as well, but I figured it's totally my issue. It's I that have the problem with it.

Alf: Yeah, it's totally my issue. That's the problem when I don't practice for a week, I become a total asshole. And then I feel kind of bad afterwards.

Alf, and Cherry, are initially very angry with “that guy”, who in their view was not sensitive enough towards them and the norms in the Shala. The Shala is very crowded at times, but still you're supposed to respect another's space, and at least “give a fuck” when you're forced to stand close. Cherry and, though a bit harder pressed to admit it, Alf, both end up blaming themselves, however. If they have an issue with someone, it is they who have the problem. It is they who are imbalanced, and Alf links this imbalance to the fact that he has not practiced for a week. He *needs* the practice to stay balanced and not end up acting like an asshole.

This whole incident, and how Cherry, and, more grudgingly, Alf, check their own reactions, says something both of the rules and norms of practicing in the Shala, social life in Mysore, as well as what is correct behaviour for aspiring yogis in general. Even though the Shala is packed to maximum during led classes, a student's yoga mat is a personal space, which delimits that student's spot during the practice. Most will gingerly step across someone else's mat, trying, as much as possible, not to enter that space. Only in some *asanas*, where you almost inevitably will travel outside your own space, is it permissible to touch the mat of people around you – and even on these occasions you usually excuse yourself. As such, it is interesting that they end up blaming themselves for making a big deal of these incidents, and concluding that it is they who have issues with it. This is much in line with the idea of non-attachment and a balanced mind in Hindu and yoga philosophy. Anger is to be avoided. Also in other

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

situations the self is often blamed, for instance when someone does not find the practice in the Shala rewarding, but rather that it is too crowded, too ego-driven and offering too little guidance. Although some blamed the “set-up” it was equally normal, when pronounced at all, to hear that: “It just isn’t what is suitable for me right now.” This kind of self-blame might be a way of communicating awareness of one’s own state of being – of knowing oneself – and thus, gaining some credibility. Another aspect of these “confessions” of one’s own inadequacy might, of course, be concern with the social sanctions or repercussions that a critique of the Shala can have. As such, it functions to control and keep people in check.

All is not competition and ego-based, though. Ideas of leading others on to the path of yoga, guiding others within the practice and teaching as way of giving something back to the practice and to yoga are also prevalent. Compassion and non-judgment are central values within the yoga family, and might take part in explaining why people blame themselves when things get out of hand. Greater knowledge and insight in the ways of yoga can also foster a sense of compassion towards those who do not know what they are doing yoga-wise. They have started on the path, they will, in time, experience the “joy” of yoga and the reason for walking down that road will (hopefully) become clear on a later stage. As Paula says:

Well I wish everybody can taste art in their own lives, and that they can be connected with the truth and with awareness, and paint their life, or live their life from there. That’s why I’m doing the work I’m doing [teaching yoga], and I really hope that a lot of people get in touch with that. Yoga is a very clear way. If yoga is... when it’s well taught, and it’s well heeded. It can help a lot of people. It is really sad how much drama going on, and people believing in the dramas. How much pain people have to go through and believe in their pain.

She also estimated that about 25 percent of the students in the Shala actually know what they are doing, while “the rest are just jumping around”. Despite this, she is glad they come, since any reason for practicing is beneficial. If they do not know what they are doing in this life, they might in the next. Practicing is nonetheless a good thing, according to her, since it can eventually lead you on the right path. Everybody has to start somewhere.

So there is compassion and empathy for those who have not been introduced to the path of yoga, or they have but they are still clinging to the drama of life and believe in their pain. If yoga is taught correctly it can help a lot of people, and Paula wants everybody to have what she has, and connect with the truth and awareness that is yoga in her view. Although there are conflicts, these feelings of compassion are perhaps more prevalent when people talk about the benefits and goals of their yoga practice. Such negotiations are at the heart of yoga practice, and will resurface throughout this thesis, and be the topic of Chapter 6.

### The two shalas

In the middle of August, I had lunch with Stian and Izzy. Charles was also invited and the talk, after a while, turned to the practice in the Shala. We all agreed that practicing in the Shala with Saraswathi was better than being in the Shala in January and February. Stian said that he probably would not be back at that time later,<sup>68</sup> and if he had known what it would be like in the peak season, he might not have come in the first place. 2009 was the first time he was in Mysore. Izzy, his girlfriend, agreed, everything was much better now in August. Now people are friendly, they greet each other, and talk with each other. In the beginning of the year there had been too much competition, and people fought over their spots in the Shala, especially for the led classes. Charles said that everybody wanted to show off in front of Sharath, and that the atmosphere just was not that good. They were also wondering what would happen in the future, and whether Sharath would come back to teach, as at the moment there were rumours that he was really tired of teaching and might not come back – at least not anytime soon. Charles thought that he would not be back. Stian had heard something about “limited students”, but did not know what that meant, whether it entailed a limited number of students, or if there were to be some kind of selection over who would be allowed to come.<sup>69</sup>

This conversation highlights some of the differences that students perceive between “The Main Shala” and Saraswathi’s teaching. Note that “The Main Shala” has two connotations. The first meaning is just *the* Shala, that is KPJAYI, as separated from

---

<sup>68</sup> Izzy and Stian were in Mysore when I returned to Mysore in February 2011, though, and had been back in between my stays.

<sup>69</sup> 065412082009

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

other places in Mysore where yoga can be studied. The other meaning is taking classes with Sharath, contrasted with taking classes with Saraswathi. Sharath teaches “The Main Shala”, and then afterwards Saraswathi teaches her students. When Sharath is away, Saraswathi is the only teacher (though in 2011 both Sharath and Saraswathi started having assistants). Sharath starts teaching at 0430 AM and goes on until about 0900. Saraswathi is usually there for the main part of Sharath’s class, but “her” students will come from about 0800-0830 AM, depending on the number of students in “The Main Shala”. As Sharath is the one who can authorise and certify teachers, there is perceivably more pressure and tendency to show off during his classes, while Saraswathi’s presence does not have this effect to the same degree. Another reason for the differences in atmosphere is probably the sheer numbers of students who practice in the Shala at the different times of year. When Sharath teaches there are more people coming in, the numbers rising towards Christmas, peaking in January and February, and then sinking a bit in March. These fluctuations have a huge impact on the general mood of social life in Gokulam, as there is a rather higher tension during the peak season than during summer. There are also certain social divisions between Sharath and Saraswathi’s students when both teach. Part of this is because of the different schedules, which means that Sharath’s students begin and finish earlier than the others, which gives a slightly different rhythm to their day. Additionally Sharath’s rest day is Saturday, while Saraswathi’s day off is Sunday. Sharath’s class is also harder to get into and it is more prestigious to study with him, lending his students an air of superiority.

Another interesting part of the conversation is the rumour mongering. As there is not much to be had in terms of “real” information about the future happenings of the Shala, especially not in the long run, rumours are rather sought after. Rumours stemming from people “close to” Sharath, the Shala, or teachers with high status in the Ashtanga community – and these things are often overlapping – are often more valued than that coming from others. That the rumours do not always hit the mark does not really matter. People crave information, and the lack of official statements, means that people turn to more or less robust rumours. One prevalent rumour during my 2009 stay was that Sharath was going away, and perhaps not coming back to teach, at least for three years. This would mean accordingly that the Shala would close at the end of March. The rumours were so persistent that I considered changing



my field, and perhaps going to Goa to do my research while practicing with Rolf Naujokat.<sup>70</sup> As it turned out, Saraswathi took over all the teaching from April, and Sharath came back during summer to hold a teacher training.<sup>71</sup> And he also taught from October the same year. Holding more or less accurate information on Sharath's plans for the future is also a way of acquiring a standing among Ashtanga practitioners.

The mat marks both physically and symbolically the separation and boarder between individual practitioners. It is a delimitation of a private space. Further the notion of the two shalas represent a boundary between two groups within the Ashtanga community. The boundaries are marking both the difference, and an underlying similarity, between the students, which make both the comparison possible and the differentiation necessary in a Barthian sense (Barth 1969).<sup>72</sup> Transgression of these boundaries makes them visible, and can thus force the students to contemplate both similarities and differences, as well as central values of the practice, as seen by the "mat-incident". Sharath and Saraswathi, and more recently the assistants, move between these private spaces and tie the individual students together. The Shala itself also physically and symbolically gathers all the students under a common roof – metaphorically and literarily. Identity as such is created at several "levels", each having an impact on similarities, differences, cooperation and possible conflict. Here we see individual students,<sup>73</sup> groups within the community, and the Ashtanga family, which I now return to.

### Family values

In "Back to The Future", Ruth Prince and David Riches (1999) argue that the New Age movement can be interpreted as a countercultural way of life. In their romanticism of tribal societies, Western New Agers seek an alternative lifestyle and a

---

<sup>70</sup> Rolf Naujokat was certified to teach Ashtanga yoga by Guruji in 1996, and teaches at Yoga Bones, in Goa. < <http://www.yogabones.org/index.html> > Yoga Bones is a very popular destination for Mysore students when the Shala is closed for extended periods.

<sup>71</sup> This was the first teacher training ever held by KPJAYI.

<sup>72</sup> More on the delimitation of mats and boundary maintenance see chapter 6, page 137. On the fundamental premises of comparison see chapter 2, page 29. Johansen (2008) is an elaboration of Bateson's theories and a very valuable contribution on the nature of boundaries. See also Fyhn (2011).

<sup>73</sup> And if we look inwards, each student also embody "different" values and identities, which might be reflected upon, altered, create tension etc. The "mat-incident" and the students' tendency to blame themselves for "unyogic" behaviour are illustrative of such conflicting identities/values.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

way of living, which they actively contrast with the “mainstream individualism” and the economic and ecological exploitation they claim is prevalent in “Modern Western capitalistic societies”. They rather seek egalitarian societies, with flexible, social organisations:

... where the individual is correspondingly permitted a very considerable autonomy in the routines of everyday life; meanwhile, their cosmological uphold a holistic relationship between human beings and the natural environment. (Prince and Riches 1999: 110)

Prince and Riches argue that the New Age movement can be framed as a “back to basics” social experiment (1999: 110), where a more “humane individualism” is a central notion, and continue to compare present-day New Agers with pre-modern tribal societies. In choosing to pursue the Ashtanga path, many of the yoga students travelling to India consciously decide to step out of the hustle and bustle of mainstream society, as they perceive it. Rejecting mainstream values and becoming part of the Ashtanga yoga “family” they seek an alternative way of living and being. Talking of “family” and “community” are ways of telling oneself and others what kind of society one wants to live in. Importantly it is also telling of the actual experience of being with one’s fellow yoga practitioners. Being in Mysore and practicing in the Shala feels like being in a community or a family, and this is the way they want it to be. As Turner (1997) writes of the hippie movement: “What they seek is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared” (Turner 1997: 138). Asking someone who their teacher is can thus be seen as way of establishing kinship, and placing someone into the lineage, metaphorically drawing the family tree. In establishing these relationships, they are potentially building a hierarchy within the community though, as there is a certain status and authority attached to being close to the roots and the Jois family.

The Ashtanga family is a small-scale community at the edge of mainstream society, and the members of this community are constantly reinforcing the boundaries between themselves and others. They are experimenting with an alternative way of living and being together, and as Prince and Riches’ New Agers, the Ashtanga practitioners by the most “... being university educated, intellectually minded and

social critical, are well-equipped to engage in such experiment...” (1999: 119), especially since they are mostly financially autonomous. On the other hand the rejected “modern society” makes these kinds of experiments possible (i.e., Prince and Riches 1999; Heelas 2008; Heelas and Woodhead et. al. 2005; Johansen 2007). In large scale *Gesellschafts* (Tönnies 2001) there is usually a greater freedom to actually adopt and implement *Gemeinschaft* (Tönnies 2001) elements in choosing one’s way of organising one’s life. This is especially true at the “edges” of mainstream society (Johansen 2007). The yoga students are establishing a community or family where close and multiplex relationships are valued, and they share what they perceive as an intimate and very personal practice. They also contrast this way of living with the shallow relationships that characterise Western society, which is marked by characteristics of *Gesellschaft* societies – uniplex relations and fleeting, shallow, impersonal and professional relationships – and criticising the money-driven, fast paced way people are forced to live.

Apart from a “family” the fellowship of Ashtanga practitioners can be interpreted as a “community of practice” (Lave 1991; Marchand 2008), where the yoga students are “apprentices” in a socially situated activity. Especially in Mysore they are immersed in a learning environment where most of their energy and activities evolve around the practice they are involved in. This immersion

... in addition to facilitating technical know-how, structures the practitioner’s hard-earned acquisitions of social knowledge, worldviews and moral principles that denote membership and status in a trade. (Marchand 2008: 246)

As I will show more clearly in Chapter 6, practicing “the trade of” yoga entails much more than executing a few *asanas*, and being a part of the Ashtanga family in Mysore facilitates the appropriation of the correct attitude towards the practice as a whole, as well as life in general. In being socialised into the practice the students are being transformed as “... possession and performance of such skills become inextricably tied to their emerging social and professional identities” (Marchand 2008: 248).

As nodes KPJAYI and Mysore are mediating “... between the locally and temporally present and absent” (Glaeser 2006: 86). These are places of mediation and meeting –

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

that are arenas of friction (Tsing 2005) – where yogis and anthropologists alike can get further inklings of reality and the workings of the universe. A node, as an “area” of connections, is not necessarily a tidy place of fluid cooperation and dialog without misunderstandings. The connections might as easily be characterized by chance encounters and misconceptions. KPJAYI mobilises the knowledge of yoga, making it available to a broader set of people. This is where people and ideas meet, interact and eventually might change. It is where the practice and the rules of the practice of the community are implemented, laid down and then carried into the world. Nodes are places of power and potentiality. The institute also facilitates the “conversion” of localised Indian religious knowledge to a more “universal” language of health and freedom in making yoga available for interpretation to an international audience. Although the Ashtanga practice might not carry the same significance for all practitioners, since everybody does the interpretation against the backdrop their personal experience, KPJAYI is a zone where people can talk and act together in a shared practice. These encounters are fundamental in fashioning Ashtanga yoga as both a personal and social practice, as it is the way of learning to live as a yogi as knowledge of practice and practical matters are exchanged. Fashioning boundaries is both a way of attempting to take control and a way of establishing a separate identity. At the same time, the Shala and its most engaged adherents try to discipline the (other) students and the students’ bodies to the regime of the Ashtanga yoga practice, and in that way instil the “correct” values and dispositions – in Bourdieu’s (2007) vocabulary, the correct habitus – much like the gym forges the apprentice boxers (Wacquant 2004, 2005). These values and dispositions stem from not only the physical practice of the chosen trade, but from the complete immersion in the environment of the practice. This is in line with Desjarlais’ (1992) initiation as a shaman among the Yolomo wa. Thus the instilled habitus, once rooted, also stretch well beyond the “practice proper”.

Establishing and upholding the Ashtanga yoga community, and denoting it “family” entails marking boundaries towards other groups of people, and as we have seen – and as I will show further – the Ashtanga practitioners are preoccupied with capturing the essence of the their practice. ‘Family’ as a term evokes notions of intimacy and primacy. The Ashtanga family is a chosen and symbolic family, and as with “tribe”, “family” might represent an “original” state. “Family” can be a powerful symbol as a

root and a womb. It is a place for gestation, (re-) birth, and growing to maturity. At the same time though, the students are negotiating the boundaries between themselves as individuals and other persons within the practice, as well as towards the rest of the family/community. Questions of where to draw the line between my practice and me on the one hand, and between me and the group on the other, are central. The mat becomes a concrete representation of “my space” and myself, and for drawing a line between me and other students. Transgressing this boundary is threatening, can create tension, but might also result in reflection. Metaphorically the teachers are also weaving a common thread between the students by their adjustments and movement across the boundaries. Boundaries are not only drawn internally. Negotiations on method and practice also take place in relation to other communities of yoga practice. While it is vital to establish why and how yoga is beneficial, it is perhaps equally important to determine how Ashtanga yoga differs from other styles of yoga practice. It is the erection of boundaries between different schools of yoga that will be the topic of the next part.

#### 4.5 Ashtanga and KPJAYI related to other yoga and shalas

Although most Westerners travelling to Mysore practice at KPJAYI, this does not apply to everybody, and some of those who enrol there do not find what they are looking for and move on to other yoga shalas in the vicinity. Late in August 2009 I ate breakfast at Om with among others Sarah and Mandy. I had not seen them in the Shala for a while, and during breakfast I found out why. They had started practicing with Sheshadri in Lakshmipuram. Sarah was very happy about practicing there, saying: “When you have started with Sheshadri, you don’t go back!” In Lakshmipuram they practice twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon, and they get adjusted in almost every pose. There are much fewer people in class, maybe 20 in the morning, and only between 3 and 5 in the afternoon. Sarah was already a bit into the second series with Sheshadri. He is more relaxed they told me, and people are more allowed to try the poses they want to, and can also do preparatory stretches before doing the postures.<sup>74</sup> In general the teaching has a less rigid form. Somehow we started talking about the heritage of the practice. Sarah found it strange that so few

---

<sup>74</sup> This was a difference noted by Sarah and Mandy. According to my experience, doing preparatory stretches in some poses is not a problem in the Shala either.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

people remember Krishnamacharya, who taught both B.K.S. Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois, and go to the shala where he actually taught. This shala, the Mysore Krishnamacharya Yoga Shala, is in Mysore, and the head teacher there is B.N.S. Iyengar, who was Sheshadri’s teacher. To Sarah this attested that people have rather short memory-spans when they spurn one branch of yoga for the sake of another. To honour the tradition would, in her opinion imply seeing the close relationship between the different offshoots of Krishnamacharya’s heritage.

There is some rivalry between practitioners of different branches of yoga. Registering at the Shala, you have to sign a contract that you will not practice *asana* or *pranayama* at any other school during your stay. Some yoga students readily state that their way of practicing is better than other styles. Reacting to this, quite a few who have tried different kinds of yoga, will hail their different qualities or at least not judge too harshly which they think is the better method. Helena is a Polish student living in America. She has practiced many different styles, and although practicing in the Shala did not feel right for her, making her move on to Bheemashakti, she is saddened by those who degrade other styles:

I did all kinds of styles, you know, and I tried to go deeper in practice. And with each style, right? But now of course, living in India, I know that it wasn’t deep. But deep enough to understand after 10 years of kind of trying all different styles, that it really doesn’t matter, which class you take, which style you take, you know. I don’t really think that it is wise to be possessive over a style or over, you know, a path... or... And! Not just be possessive, but also sort of degrade other styles, and say; “oh, this one is the good one, and all the other ones are not.” I went deep enough in all those different styles to understand that, and to really know and to actually even feel uncomfortable when people do that. It hurts me when people do that, when people say, you know, “I practice this style and they don’t know what they are talking about.” It happens quite a lot. But I never found the teacher, I never found, you know, the safe place where I felt like... or, you know, I probably wasn’t ready to dedicate my reality and my life to practice enough to say: “Ok, you know, I really wanna go into it.”

As Helena illustrates, there are those practitioners who are very preoccupied with what form of yoga is the best. The answer is often related to perceived authenticity, whether the notion is tied to how ancient the practice itself is or how ancient the teacher’s sources are. Ashtanga yoga was established by Pattabhi Jois about 60 years ago, and as such is not that old. Rather, its claim of being *the* authentic yoga is based

on its rootedness in Patañjali's "Yoga Sutras" and an ancient text called the "Yoga Korunta", which Pattabhi Jois is said to have studied with his guru Krishnamacharya (Stern in the foreword to Jois 2002: xv ff. See also Smith (2007, 2008) for a critical consideration of the authenticity of the "Yoga Korunta").

The different schools of MPY are establishing boundaries between their methods, and delimiting the amount of "shopping around" done by students, by claiming the authenticity of just *their* style of yoga, as exemplified by Jennifer experience:

I once asked Sharath: "I may never come to India again, what would you think of... if it's ok that I spend some time studying with Iyengar?" His answer was: "This is the best method. This is most authentic. This is best, you stick with this." And I can't know, but I feel that if I had asked Iyengar: "How do you feel about me trying some different type of yoga?" It would have been more like: "Try anything you want." And so it's ironic, because in that way, in some ways Ashtanga is not telling you what to do with your heel and your shoulder, and your this and your that, but it is imposing so much on you externally, and these are the days you practice, this is how you practice, you only do this, this is what's important, it's an imposition in a way to even say, don't ask questions about alignments. It's imposing a mental state in an approach.

In addition to illustrating the claim for authenticity done by Sharath, the quote shows how Jennifer herself tries to evaluate her different practices. There is some tension here between the framework that the school of Ashtanga is trying to lay down and Jennifer's personal experience and cravings for establishing her own personal practice. The "mental state in the approach" is somewhat interfering with her personal freedom, and Jennifer is trying to untangle this incongruence in her own practice. The external and mental impositions Jennifer mentions, are framing the *asana* practice, and are as such central in delimiting the different yoga methods.

For Jennifer the ranking between the methods is not about how ancient the practice is, but rather how open-minded or injurious it is. This means that there are several ways of evaluating different yoga practices, depending on ideas of authenticity, how demanding or challenging they are physically, how injurious they might be, or whether the practitioners themselves are open minded or not. These rankings are not necessarily evaluative in saying this practice is better or worse than that way of

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

practicing yoga, or this yoga is more or less authentic. Ranking might also be a way of sketching one’s own development in yoga practices in general, and thus a way of identifying not only different methods but also oneself. Damien, below, describes how he ended up practicing Ashtanga yoga. This story is not only about his views of different yoga styles, but also his own development as an apprentice of yoga practice:

I started very slowly. My first teacher was very – I think he was more Iyengar based – very aware of structural alignment and he was very big on - how do you say...? - Functional structure. The *asanas* weren’t an end in themselves, it was of how you can be comfortable in your everyday life, when you’re sitting, when you’re walking. What it’s going to contribute to a healthier, functioning... and so my first classes were just once a week for two hours, and I would be drained physically, emotionally, mentally and it was really tough, like I needed another week before I could get back in there and do it, because it was very challenging to the ego, you know. There are these tiny women doing *vasisthasana*<sup>75</sup> on the side and they’re just perfectly solid and I’m shaking like a noodle in every pose. So it was a big change to see that I had neglected myself so much. And then gradually it got more... Every other day, couple of times a week. And yeah, I didn’t push it too much right away. As I got more into it, things like... I still drank a little bit at that point, and the more I got into staying in tune, the less I wanted to drink. The less I was going out, and... Still smoking weed though... That’s been a constant for a while... And yeah, I moved on from my first initial teacher to more Vinyasa Flow classes, like Power yoga style, and that was good, that worked for a couple of years. Working through basics, and opening, building strength. Building my cardio-vascular endurance. And then about two years ago I finally worked my way up to Ashtanga, and again I was like starting over from scratch. Pretty amazing.

Damien has *worked his way up to Ashtanga* by the way of many different styles. In sketching his own trajectory in the world of yoga, and the impact the practice has had on his life, he thus orders the different styles in a hierarchy according to how demanding he has found them. But, although he sees Ashtanga as the hardest yoga practice, the elitism of the Ashtanga milieu turned him off. The Ashtanga practice as such is a powerful practice, but in mastering this practice there is the danger of creating elitism by inflating the ego. With the wrong mind-set, the Ashtanga practice is not necessarily the best. In Damien’ view, every practice is powerful in its own way, and people should practice what they can, as all yoga is good. He expounds on this:

---

<sup>75</sup> In Ashtanga this posture is taught as a part of the third series (appendix p. xxix). See also Iyengar (1994: 309-311) for description of the posture.



Yeah, so that really turned me off. I met this one girl, and she's very strong. She was almost finishing second series at the time. But she would talk about how these Vinyasa Flow classes. She can't even stand to go in there because it's like culture shock and these people don't know what real yoga is and all this. And it really pisses me off. You know? That's all most people can handle... It's like an Iyengar class or a flow class, and to say that it's not valid or that it's not, you know, powerful in its own ways - I think just ignorant. And so it took a while, I had to meet a lot more ashtangis to see that they're not all like that.

One point here is that it is not necessarily those with the most knowledge and insight into yoga as practice and philosophy who are the most outspoken practitioners. As was seen above, the old-timers in the Mysore circuits are often portrayed as reclusive and quiet people who do not participate too much in the social scene. Rather they are portrayed as people who are “just doing their practice”, do not talk about their practice, or others' practices and although they might have strong opinions, they keep their opinions to themselves. Some are rather outspoken though: For newcomers, it can be important to establish the importance of the practice, and for others, investing much time and effort makes the stakes higher, thus, championing one's own practice, and establishing boundaries towards other practices, are ways of defending one's own choices and ways of living. It is a way of saying: “I have made the right choice.”

Establishing boundaries and delimiting one's own practice from that of others, is a way of ascertaining the relevance and importance of that practice. The comparison with other practices, or groups of practitioners, is also a way of identifying the unique features of one's own practice. Comparison and boundary maintenance are central elements in building and maintaining identities (Barth 1969). The Ashtanga community defines itself in relation to other forms of yoga, as well as to “mainstream” society, but as I have shown, despite the erection and identification of these differences, the Ashtanga family is not a community without strife. As a community of practice, (Lave 1991; Marchand 2008) the Ashtanga family rests on the common practice of Ashtanga yoga, and the students are being disciplined into and transformed by this practice. The community is a corporation that is gathered around the estate that is yoga. In the following, I will turn to the basic structures of the

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

practice in the Shala and will begin to sketch out some of the disciplining measures of the yoga practice.<sup>76</sup>

#### 4.6 Yoga in the Shala in Mysore

When one comes to Mysore for the first time, you have to learn a lot of rules and norms on how the practice in the Shala works. The practice is the same as back home, and so is the sequence of *asana*, but surrounding the series of postures there are several rules of conduct. Being in Mysore and practicing in the Shala entails being enrolled in a social practice where, as for apprenticeship...

... the process of changing knowledgeable skill is subsumed in processes of changing identity in and through membership in a community of practitioners; and mastery is an organizational, relational characteristic of communities of practice. (Lave 1991: 64)

Practicing in the Shala, and being a part of the Mysore community can with long lasting commitment amount to “enskilment” (Ingold 2000) in Ashtanga yoga. Enskilment entails gaining the capacity of awareness and action in a situated environment (Ibid.). It shapes the practitioners identity, and level of skill and knowledge is a part of the social organisation of the Ashtanga family. In Mysore, through being cut off from their everyday lives, and where most daily routines are fitted to the practice, the aspiring ashtangis are immersed in the practice, and the values and “obligations” thereof, in a larger degree than back home. Some first-timers come with an idea of what to expect, having been briefed by people who have been there before, for instance their teachers. Some experienced teachers, who have been authorised or certified, will also advice their students on whether a trip to Mysore and KPJAYI will benefit their practice or not. Yet, even with information coming to the Shala can be a mindboggling experience. Packed with people deeply focused on their individual practice, the sheer intensity of that room can be overwhelming. It can also be overwhelming to stand face-to-face with Sharath for the first time. The experience of the first meeting with the institute will vary a bit depending on what time of year it takes place, and how many students are there, but still waiting in line in the hallway is, I think, slightly nerve-wrecking for most. Many students emphasize that they did

---

<sup>76</sup> The physical aspects of the practice, and the impact on the body, will be the topic of chapter 5, where I also return to different styles of yoga and the enactment (Mol 2002) of different bodies.

not have any expectations when they arrived, or that they had heard a lot about the practice, but tried to suppress any expectations and just go with what they met. Registering at the Shala, all are given a time-slot. The first slot is at 0430 AM, and most peoples' practices, depending on how advanced they are, last for 45 minutes and upwards. The first series takes approximately one hour, depending on how fast or slow you breath. The next batch is let in when the students in the first batch start their finishing sequence. After that, there is a new time-slot every fifteen minutes or so. As people leave Mysore, your time keeps changing to earlier slots. When I first arrived in 2009 to practice with Sharath, my time-slot was 0830, but I kept being "bumped up" – which is the term used for the "promotion" – until my slot became 0430 in March, which it was until I left in early September. The first thing many students learn the hard way, if they have not been warned by older students, is that "Shala time" is approximately 15 minutes ahead of "real time", which means that many show up 15 minutes late on their first (few) days. That is, the clock in the Shala is always, and has always been as far as I've been able to find out, 15 minutes ahead of clocks outside the Shala. During the week coming late is not necessarily that noticeable as there usually is some lag in getting into the Shala.

When arriving in the Shala, you have to wait for your turn, which is not only decided by the time-slot, but also by whether there is space in the room and whether there are people from earlier time-slots who have yet to get in. If you are too early, you might be told to go outside and wait for your turn, and if you are late you might be met with a "Why you late?!" and you might be asked to explain yourself. Keeping a keen eye on your place in the line is recommended, but not required, as there are always other students who will be watchful and keep order. Cutting in line is not welcome, and the only time this is ok is if Sharath or Saraswathi call in a particular student or if someone really is not paying attention and the call from inside is repeated several times with growing annoyance. Those most eager to keep order in the hallway become gatekeepers, in a way, and will ask what time slot you have been given and point out to those arriving whose next in line. This is social control students execute on each other. As those in the Shala finish their backbending, and head for the locker-room or the stage for the finishing sequence, Sharath or Saraswathi will call out "one more" and point you to your spot. Once inside you roll out your mat in the designated spot, and then go to the locker-room to change and store your belongings. Nothing is

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

to be kept in the Shala itself, and if any bag is found in a corner or under the stone “bench” it will be commented upon and the owner will be asked to remove it duly, marking the culprit as a newcomer, just like coming late.

Once the practice is under way, you will be closely monitored, and questions and instructions are shouted from across the room. In the beginning, it is really hard to know who is being instructed. “What you did?”<sup>77</sup>, “Do it again!”, “Right foot inside!”, “Change your feet!” and other things are hurled across the room, and if the same instruction is being repeated several times, obviously, without being followed, it might be wise to check what you are doing yourself. The instructions are being shouted as commands, and newcomers can be especially intimidated, though my own experience tells me this is more a manner of speech than a way to intimidate newcomers. Although she is commanding like a drill instructor, Saraswathi is full of compassion, and if you look at Sharath while he is teaching, there is often a small smile playing behind the seemingly stern words.

In the Shala, bags and other personal belongings are “matter out of place” (Douglas 2002), and in enforcing the rules of where it is appropriate to put these things, both the sanctity of the practice space is upheld and new students are educated in the proper ways of the Shala. The concept of Shala time, which most deem totally arbitrary as none can come up with a reasonable explanation, is also interesting in these regards. Practicing in the Shala means adhering to Shala time and thus, surrendering to a time schedule cut off from time as it is measured in the world outside the Shala. Submitting and adjusting to Shala time can be interpreted as an important part of being disciplined by the Shala, and is part of becoming competent in the ways of the Ashtanga practice in Mysore. It can also be a way of separating the Shala from the “ordinary” world, as it becomes not only a “place apart”, but also concretely “time apart” as it marks its difference from the outside world. Time-wise, the Shala is “betwixt and between” (Turner 1979, 1997). For some students, the peculiarities of the time keeping in the Shala do not become apparent until their first led-class, when there are only two time slots. Coming late these days means that everybody is already well into the practice and will become acutely aware of one’s

---

<sup>77</sup> Meaning: “What pose did you just do?”

late coming – and usually will be told off. It marks the dawdler as a novice in Mysore, and is a rather rough way of learning. At least the lesson will not be forgotten easily.

It takes time in the Shala to untangle the ambiguity between commands and compassion. Being able to decipher the interactions in the room is a competence that can be cultivated with deepening awareness and becoming more sensitive to the context of the practice. This does not necessarily happen with everybody though.

A Swedish girl was very tired and had been a bit late to practice one day, and also failed to catch that Sharath had twice tried to call her into the Shala. When she finally got in and approached her designated spot, Sharath asked her, seemingly a bit sternly, “Have you had coffee?” She did not know quite what to answer, but she interpreted him to mean that she should not drink coffee before practicing. She took this comment as a reprimand, and reflected quite a bit over it afterwards. She also made it a topic at lunch the same day. I actually overheard Sharath’s comment, and had a rather different take on the whole situation. I interpreted the comment as a joke. My interpretation was based on the knowledge of Guruji’s view on coffee as energizing, and the fact that she was a bit late, looked tired, and did not hear Sharath calling her. Had she had coffee, she would have been less tired and more attentive. My point is that many of the students in the Shala are quite intent, and very eager to do the right thing, but not always fully tuned to the context. Thus, every message that they receive is carefully interpreted and searched for deeper significance, and they are confused by messages that they cannot interpret easily. The Swedish girl did not really recognise Sharath’s comment as a joke, because, to her, the Shala was a serious place for a serious practice. The “flexibility” of the norms encourage sensitivity towards them, such as being aware of when they apply and when they do not, though it can also create anxiety when someone finds it hard to interpret certain rules or situations. A greater understanding of situational differences arises with the passing months, return visits and the observation of other students. I came to recognise these attitudes and insights in myself at times, when I either scoffed slightly at people who skipped practices, or came in late because they were not aware of the Shala time. At other times I just smiled a bit to myself when people left their bags in the Shala instead of the locker room, knowing that they would be told in front of everybody else to remove their items.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

As to whether Sharath and Saraswathi are too strict and not compassionate enough, even oblivious to what most of the students are doing, stern because they have to be to keep order in the Shala, or actually very compassionate and give the individual students what they *actually* need to improve their practice, opinions are a divided. But as people stay for a while it seems most conclude that they have been seen all the time, and that very few of the things happening in the Shala pass unnoticed by the teachers. In the throng of about 250 students at the Sunday conference, Sharath will know if someone is not a student in the Shala, and both Sharath and Saraswathi usually know where every student is in the series and when they are ready for a new pose. Or least: this is how the students who are happy with the practice in the Shala will put it. Others will say that it is too crowded, there is not enough hands-on adjustment, or that the adjustments can be injurious. Practicing in the Shala is also too costly, especially considering that you are mostly doing your own practice without getting any attention.

As I have made clear, some students have a difficult time adjusting to practicing in the Shala, while others never become too happy about it. These were the misgivings some had and vocalized, and while some stopped practicing there and sought other places to study, others continued and just kept on complaining. These complaints were by others hypothesized to stem from the differences between the Indian and Western ways of thinking and being, and the clash between strong personalities or egos. Keeping the many strong personalities in check was one reason for Sharath's strictness, I was told.

Teaching in the Shala is built on the traditional guru-disciple relationship, which is characterised by love and respect. It is often thought that the guru will show himself and come to the student when the student is ready.<sup>78</sup> The student is subservient to the guru and is to follow him unquestioningly. The guru should be compassionate but firm in his teaching. The guru is the holder of knowledge and the truth. The student, who is to follow every instruction, does not necessarily understand the guru's ways.

---

<sup>78</sup> For an illustration of the dynamics between guru and disciple, see for instance Yogananda's (1949) famous autobiography. For a rather different account of modern-day guru worship see O'Yeah (2005). See Barth (1990) for an anthropological analysis of guru's and their management and transmission of knowledge.

This truth is guarded but will be revealed in time, and the student will then see clearly the wisdom of his teacher. The guru is the one who knows what the student needs and only by obeying the teacher will the student learn. (Barth 1990).

What I have presented thus far, have been rather rudimentary outlines of the personnel, the social dynamics of yoga life and the practice of Ashtanga yoga in Mysore and the Shala. These sketches will frame the topics to come. In principle the students are surrendering to Sharath's stern discipline. However, different practitioners of Ashtanga meet in Gokulam and the Shala, and they *negotiate* the significance of the teachings in rather messy interactions. Social life in Mysore is marked by "... the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interaction across differences" (Tsing 2005: 4). This is something of a paradox, as most yoga students will hail the universality of the practice. "On the ground" though it is not always inherently clear how these "universals" are to be applied to individual lives and practice, and though equally endowed with bodies, these bodies are not equal. Parts of the negotiations taking place concern the boundaries of the community and the Ashtanga family. Others centre on the interaction between the "family members". Coming to Mysore is a way of enclosing and situating the practice, and lifting it out of the currents of everyday life allows each student to concentrate on his or her practice in a way that is not as easily achieved back home. Practicing in Mysore and meeting other dedicated practitioners highlights similarities and differences that are not necessarily that visible in the home practice.

The actual *asana* practice in the Shala is further "betwixt and between" (Turner 1979, 1997) as it is physical enclosed from the social life in Mysore and governed by its own time. Much like Turner's (ibid.) "liminal phase", or Durkheim's sacred time (1979) the morning practice and hence "Shala time" acts to structure time and other aspects of life in Mysore. Or as Strauss (2005) writes, "The practice of yoga was a way to create a separate space, both temporally and emotionally, but not geographically. It was quite literally, a way to take a time out" (Strauss 2005: 58).

The students learn to discern Ashtanga from other styles of yoga, and by deepening their practices, they learn to discern the significant aspects of Ashtanga yoga, and for instance, see the compassion that is veiled by the strict commands, as well observing

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

the correct behaviour in the Shala. They are disciplined into the community and they build cultural competence in acting correctly, not only in the Shala, but also in any Ashtanga studio worldwide. The students are disciplined to adhere to the rules and values that, beside the common practice, are the foundations of the “family” of practitioners. That is, they develop skills not only in executing ever more advanced *asanas*, but more importantly, they are better able to clothe these skills with the *proper* meaning and knowledge. Travelling to India to practice in the Shala is a way legitimating oneself as an Ashtanga practitioner. Additionally it can be a way of keeping power as a teacher, and also of upholding hierarchy within the worldwide community of Ashtanga practitioners. As they practice in the Shala, they become transformed into yoga practitioners, and newcomers gradually become old-timers, with the potential of becoming authorised and even certified teachers. This is also how the Ashtanga community is re-produced, and as we will see, potentially transformed.

In appropriating practices and entering new social worlds, there is a need to adopt practice. We need to learn how to learn (Desjarlais 1992), or what Bateson (2000c) calls deutro-learning. This is pronounced in yoga, where there is not only the right posture but also the right attitude, or frame of mind, that is sought. Through moving through the physical world of the Yolmo wa, eating, greeting, walking and talking, Desjarlais (1992) also learned how to be in a trance, and how to behave as an initiate of Meme Bombo, the local shaman. All bodied activity tied into each other, and through embodying the everyday life of the Yolmo wa, he gained a better understanding<sup>79</sup> of their universe. He learned how to learn how to be such an initiate. This is also how aspiring yogis learn to be yogis, in doing the practice, being in Mysore and interacting with more experienced yoga students, as well as their teachers.

---

<sup>79</sup> “Understanding” has perhaps not the entirely right connotations, as it might lead us to think of rationality, and thought as such. Here it entails more of a bodily understanding, or an embodied way of being in that world.



As a situated practice (Lave 1991; Marchand 2008), Ashtanga in Gokulam is a kind of laboratory work<sup>80</sup>, where the Ashtanga practice is prepared before being exported worldwide. The students thus become vehicles that carry the practice and the knowledge of it to the wider world. Students are apprentices being fitted and disciplined into the correct practice, and the Gokulam Shala is (by most) acknowledged as the supplier of the terms of the practice. For one thing, there is a particular and set *vinyasa* count in Ashtanga, but additionally, many teachers with several stays in the Shala appropriate a distinctive Indian pronunciation similar to Guruji or Sharath. Mysore is the arena where the practice starts unfolding, and each student continues developing the practice as its principles are negotiated with each individual body, which is something I will return to in Chapter 5. Although the message seems to be “*This is Ashtanga*” there are continuous negotiations as each separate student embodies the practice, and each student interprets it. They enact it in very personal ways – the practice is one, but also multiple (Mol 2002). At the same time as future ashtangis are being forged in the sweaty heat of the Shala, they are also carving their own niches in the community, and as exemplified by the “mat-incident”, the social intercourse in and around the Shala are not necessarily as harmonious as stereotypical images of peaceful yogis suggest. Even in the intimacy of the Ashtanga family, there is a need for personal boundaries and autonomy. The practice is universal and the same, but simultaneously, individual and private, and thus, sometimes fiercely guarded, both by the community and individual practitioners. Adding to this potential tension is the intimacy and the near nudeness of practicing in the Shala. These aspects highlight the vulnerability of yoga practitioners, as the stakes are high.

Though the co-dependency, mutual reliance, and relative equality of the students are usually emphasized, there are, as I will show shortly, a certain hierarchy among them. This ranking is woolly and crosscuts more obvious aspects such as advancement in *asana* practice, number of Mysore trips, years in the practice, and eventual authorisation/certification. Practicing – both *asana* and the other precepts of Ashtanga – side-by-side, some students are by their fellows hailed as exemplars of correct

---

<sup>80</sup> Although students are not necessarily perceptive of or keep track of the changes, the “institutes” original name, Ashtanga Yoga Research Institutes, highlighted this explorative tendency, with the students acting both as researchers and “lab-rats.”

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

attitude and sources of inspiration. Practicing together “... each [is] interpreting and responding to the activities of the other...” (Marchand 2008: 263), which, though it is somewhat at odds with the usual emphasize on the “personal practice”, make them mutually responsible for their individual practices. In the following part, I will continue to explore the social dynamics of the Ashtanga family as a community of practice, and I will show that, though yoga students are equal, some are more equal than others, paraphrasing Orwell.

#### 4.7 “Striving for excellence together”, or “the yoga police” and establishing yoga elites

You can dress it up and say it’s the energy of everybody if you like, but I believe it’s like an audience, you know. Somebody is watching, or just in the presence of people. You just wanna try harder. A really brilliant saying that I’ve really appreciate and I’m always returning to is - I think my philosophy teacher told me - that the original meaning of competition, is not like, to kick somebody else’s ass. The original meaning of competition is: “Striving for excellence together.” And I think that really could apply to Ashtanga if you’re practicing with sincerity. We all trying to try our best, and we’re all trying to do our best in front of everybody. (Martin)

Most of us want to prove ourselves in front of others. We can do it. We have got what it takes. Though Ashtanga yoga is as personal practice, it is also a collective effort and common commitment. In Martin’s view, practicing together can make each and one of us strive for doing our best, and this is why most students feel that they benefit from practicing in the Shala. Those practicing around us influence us to some degree. And if practicing with sincerity, striving for excellence can be a good thing. This in Martin’s view is the true value of practicing in the Shala, and there’s no need to dress it up and call it “energy”. Sincerity is important though, as Martin’s observations of why he came to these realizations testify:

You know, the other day in the led class I was unfortunately stuck in the changing room, and there was just one other in there. But luckily it was my friend, Edward. So Edward and I were practicing next to each other, he had the spot so he could at least look out to the people, while I was looking at the fans<sup>81</sup>. Right? (...) There were just two of us, and we’re practicing

---

<sup>81</sup> There are a bunch of fans stored in the locker-room.

together, and after some point he stopped really trying. Fully trying, and then it gets to *uthpluthi* and, it's like, alright nobody is watching me, and he's not really trying, and I thought; screw it, and after about five breaths of *uthpluthi* I just sat down, and I said to him; "tired." It was a Friday. I got my excuses. And we're at the coconut stand afterwards, and he said to me; "I'm really sorry about that, because I realize, you know, it's like our duty to do our best because otherwise the other person... you know, we're holding each other up, and I apologize for that." and I said; "I hadn't realized that, ok, no use to apologize, but that's interesting." And then the following week I'm in the changing room again, and again with just one other. And unfortunately I don't know this guy, and right from the word go, he wasn't even trying. It was really incredible. He would like, miss out some of the sun salutations, he would sit down, he would just spend the whole sequence in down dog, the throughout the postures he would do the ones he wanted, he wouldn't do others, he would spend some of it watching me, he wouldn't jump back. And it was so bothersome to me, you know. It was like... And I felt really let down, you know, why aren't you...? Don't you realize there's somebody else in the room, you know? It is like that, I think. We try hard for everybody. It's a respect for everybody.

A lazy and uninspired practice will influence your surroundings negatively, so respecting your fellow students you should try hard. As Nevrin (2008) asserts, the environment in which you practice will have an impact on your practice. This points to the cooperative effort of Ashtanga practice in the Shala, and the dependency that is forged between the practitioners. Although the practice is personal, everybody is working together to create an atmosphere where they can achieve their utmost. In this the students contribute equally by pushing against one's own limitations, while being exemplars for the others. This characterises the re-production of communities of practice where "... [n]ewcomers furnished with comprehensive goals, an initial view of the whole, [are] improvising within the multiply structured field of mature practice within near peers and exemplars of mature practice" (Lave 1991: 72).

Advanced practitioners can be seen as exemplars, or elite, within the Ashtanga community, where the set succession of postures makes it very easy to see who are furthest into the *asana* practice. This is only one way to rank Ashtanga practitioners though, and many will say that it is not the most important one. A common refrain is

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

that being an advanced *asana* practitioner does not necessarily mean that yoga is understood and practiced for the right reasons.<sup>82</sup>

“Dedication” is another way of gaining rank in yoga circles, and though a blurry term, it is related to reasons for doing yoga and to attitudes towards self and others. *True believers* doing yoga for the right reasons, and not to become stronger, leaner or sexier, who lead by example rather than preaching, who are humble and are searching for the truth rather than striving for the more advanced *asanas* and trying to lead by persuasion, are somewhat seen as better “yogis” than the latter. Paradoxically, though, a strong lean body should not be a goal for the practice itself, a fit body, and an advanced, “beautiful” and flowing practice can be seen as a sign of a dedicated practice.

Inside the Ashtanga community, there is another way of behaving that can be perceived as elitist. This is trying to govern the conduct of other practitioners. Since it is such a personal practice, a lot of people seem to think that what works for them should also be the guideline for others. Anna and I got onto this topic while talking about how the practice has had an impact on life in general, and food in particular, and relating this to the larger societal focus on health, body and diets:

Anna: Indeed! But there is... And that is good, but there is also a moralism in that, which is... And that is there in the yoga as well. That you should do it like this, and can't do it like that! There is a... I use to call... I use to say “the yoga police.” There are a lot of yoga police. Like this: “What are you doing?! That one! You can't do it like that!” And it's so strict! I don't like that.

Me: Have you experienced that in any way? Have you been exposed to anything...?

Anna: Oh yes! But I think there is a lot of that in Ashtanga. “It is supposed to look like this.” “Guruji didn't say it like that, Guruji said this.” “No, Sharath says like this.” My experience is that there are many people who are seeking, and that think that they have gotten *the* line. “It's should be like this!” And then... they look after and guard those who walk outside of it. So

---

<sup>82</sup> A story about Guruji illustrates this. When being asked; “How do you know somebody is ready for the next posture and so on...?” He answered: “If people don't get it [understand yoga], I give them second series. And if they still do not get it, I give them third. If they still do not get it, fourth, and so on. And if they go through sixth, and they still do not get it, I don't know what to do.” I doubt that a lack of understanding is the only reason for giving students harder poses, but the story states that being advanced, posture-wise, is not the main concern of yoga practice.

it's ... it's not just ... Kind of split in my view of some things ... I'm of two minds to a lot of it. But I'm... I like the practice ... I like my practice, because it gives me so much. [My translation from Swedish]

Many have encountered the “yoga police”, students who have strong opinions about what the correct and the wrong ways to practice yoga are, and who are not afraid to tell you so in certain terms. They are self-appointed guardians of the true practice – as they perceive it to be. This can be termed a “negative” elite. Anna is, like Damien mentioned earlier, of two minds about Ashtanga because of these people, but since she likes the practice, she continues doing it. Actually, most yoga students are uncomfortable with this kind of conduct and will identify the yoga police as “the others” – those who do not understand that the practice is personal and based on one’s own experience. “They” were almost like some unseen force that people were “afraid” of naming properly.

As such, few will tell you that they are better than you or that their practice is better than yours – at least directly – and few will say explicitly that you are doing something the wrong way. Those who do not show this kind of tact are deemed rude and are perceived as rather annoying. More tersely, Damien said:

I think [about] your spirituality and your *asana* practice, Pattabhi Jois used to say: “Asking someone about their *asana* is like asking them about their anus!” You know? So it’s personal!

By invading the personal space of the practice, the “yoga police” are experienced by other students as thinking too highly of themselves and their practice. They can also come across as patronizing or even rude. This “negative” elite is believed to be (and is experienced as being) too focused on the correct enactment of advanced *asanas* and following the right diet, as well as very dogmatic in both their practice and in following the words of “high ranking” teachers and as guardians of *the* (i.e., *their*) truth, which they have “inherited” from the right teacher (e.g., one close to the source). Although there are many yoga practitioners who have very strong opinions of what is the proper way of (doing) yoga – and as such, would say they are closer to the truth – this elite is created by people who project these kinds of characteristics unto

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

others. Very few students will view themselves in this light, although some can admit to being a bit judgemental or conservative in their views of proper practice.

Expressing doubts about the outcome of the practice were not uncommon, and Jennifer has her issues, although she is careful to counterweigh the negativity:

I just think it’s about the individual and person or responsibility. And who cares whether you’re a painter or this or that or an Ashtangi or an Iyengi or whatever, it’s like; who are you and what are your goals, because it’s so clear to me when you say like, create the typical Ashtangi, I can’t because I see people here who are obnoxious and so full of like “holier than thou”, you know, like snobbishness. And I see people here, more often than that, that’s a huge rarity, I hardly ever see that, but I do. And I also see people who are so kind and so lovely, like a guy who walked me to the Shala after I’d had some bad incident - daily! Never wanting anything. Like just to provide safety for someone else who wasn’t feeling safe anymore. Or whatever it is. If you are sick and they come hang out with you or anything. So I really think it’s like; who are you? And you can use Ashtanga or yoga at large or Mysore Ashtanga to cultivate attachment and clinging and ego of like “I’m so hot and I can do tic-tacs<sup>83</sup> and I’ve been doing this for 12 years, how long have you been doing this, and I’ve studied with these people” or you can just be a nice person who notices saris and how pretty they are. And I think, really... That’s the effort for me, is to be more in the second category and that’s where the metaphor of like the daily pushing through something and seeing that you can do things you maybe thought you could never do before, are true.

Jennifer tries to capture the nature of yoga in this quote. Although some students get really snobbish and booster their ego through the practice, and they feel superior for practicing advanced postures with the most known teacher or have just been in the practice for a really long time, she also sees the opposite. Striving through the practice is enabling, and it will eventually take you places that you never thought you would go – physically and mentally. To her, that is the brilliance of yoga, or as she says, “one is making you more able to do all”. As such, her hope is that getting more experienced in doing the practice itself might actually make her more able to live more fully. The real fruits of the practice are not the practice itself, but being able to lead a better, more rewarding life. Expressing herself thus, Jennifer is exalting other aspects of the yoga practice as truer than others. Hierarchy is, in general, established

---

<sup>83</sup> *Viparita Chakrasana*, known as tic-tacs or tick-tocks, is the motion of going from down-dog to hand-stand, and further, to *urdhva dhanurasana*, back to hand-stand and down. Part of third series. See appendix 4 page xxix.

through how the practice is talked about, and how others' behaviour and practice are valued and commented upon.

Elite stature is thus not only expressed in negative terms. Many are kind guides through the world of yoga and are more than willing to help newcomers and others in their endeavours. My experience is that many students in the Shala are very eager to talk about their practice and are openhearted about their views of yoga, and thus open to share their experience. Cherry for instance, who has come to Mysore three or four times, was very glad to be of help and happy to talk to me. She also kindly admonished me, and others, to not be so attached to our practices and just be happy that we have arms and legs so as to be able to get on the mat at all. And when some of us, were exhausted after led-classes and complained (somewhat half-) jokingly that we were so tired and that Sharath or Saraswathi had held us way too long in *uthpluthi* (and that it amounted to torture), she said that we should not complain, but rather be thankful and say: "Thank you Sharath, can I have one more please?" We got her point, but never did what she asked us to do.

The "positive" or "moral" elite are those who *really* know what it is all about, i.e., it is not about collecting *asanas* and telling others how it is to be done. Those who are relaxed with their own practice, and want to just *be* and do not preach how this *just being* is supposed to be done by others. These can be interpreted as expressing superiority by distancing themselves from the ego-driven, policing kind of practitioners, if not by word, at least by deed. The practice should be personal and on top of that something you "just do" (like brushing your teeth). The paradox is of course apparent here. The people heralding this kind of practice are also quite preoccupied with the practice of other yoga students in branding them as too focused on body or being too judgmental of others, but usually if any of these people are to criticize other students they are also quick to "correct" themselves, saying "it's none of my business". Of a more "negative" note, they can follow this up with something along the lines of "but I just wish they would see that getting new postures isn't what it's all about".

Although aware of "each other" these "groups" (which may well be overlapping, and people might switch between the two kinds of elitisms) are not consciously trying to

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

create the hierarchies that might be perceived here.<sup>84</sup> The values ascribed to the different modes of elitism – especially the “negative” – are usually not ascribed by the persons showing these traits, but rather by others. Some, though, can recognize negative tendencies in themselves (often in retrospect), as is seen in the remorse Alf shows after the “mat-incident”. Many also recognize the danger of being too attached to the practice or the physical benefits it creates. On the other hand, recognizing one’s own faults and weaknesses can be a redeeming trait, and can push one towards the opposite end of the positive-negative spectrum.

Related to this way of behaving is actually downplaying one’s own standing and achievements. As self-critique can be a way of redeeming oneself from negative behaviour, downplaying one’s own knowledge can be a way of distancing oneself from the yoga police. By doing so, you might actually achieve recognition as an advanced practitioner by others. Cherry said that teaching had made her stronger, and when I asked her to elucidate she said:

Stronger in that, I think that you have to have a better understanding of the poses and how you come in and come out in order to explain to someone. So unless you... You have to have a very clear understanding of it in order to explain to someone else. So from that perspective it’s made me stronger. It’s made me realize how I much know. I told my, I said you know my mou... like I just open my mouth and I say I couldn’t believe what came out. You know that I’ve been studying and I’ve done the teacher training and done reading and been to India and I always negated. I always tell people that I’m just learning how to crawl on my yoga journey, I’m still early, early, right. So what can I tell you? So it made me realize that. And it made me realize just how much I love the yoga, and how I just want other people to have that same experience at whatever level or whatever place to help them improve their lives, cause I’m convinced it can improve people’s lives.

So self-negation is something that can lift someone up in the yoga community, which might be because of the philosophical focus on detachment and deflation of ego. That is, by being socialized into yoga circles, you learn that you should not brag. The natural reaction to this might be doing the opposite of bragging: downplaying one’s own achievements as being not that great or just not that important. Self-degradation can, thus, be a way of gaining moral superiority. Saying that “I don’t really know

---

<sup>84</sup> It is very important to note that the two kinds of “elitism” do not represent static groups within the community, but are rather “modes of being” that most practitioners can embody at different times.



much”, “I’m not that good at the practice”, “I just do what I’m told”, or just saying “I don’t really know how, but this is what works for me” is a way of rising in stature through “lowering one’s voice”, showing detachment from ego and practice.

People are, thus, disciplined into regulating, monitoring and controlling one’s own behaviour as they internalise the central values and norms of the community. Another consequence of this focus is that people learn to identify (the wrong kind of) self-aggrandisement, and perhaps also (gently) sanction wrong and right behaviour by either telling those too occupied with their practice that they should not be too attached or by rewarding those who are not. Identifying those who do not adhere to the social norms, by talking about them or characterising unyogic behaviour, in general, is thus a way of controlling – and sanctioning – behaviour in the yoga family. Behaving in ways that are recognised as “yogi-like” can thus be a foundation for gaining a higher standing in the Ashtanga family. Thus, recognising, and under- and over-communicating (Goffman 1990) unyogic and yogic behaviour, respectively, are central skills to acquire. The norms are neither static nor absolute, though. The ability to “read” social situations correctly might also foster a higher standing in any community. These kinds of “elites” emerge through the continuous interaction between different members of the community, and are based on interpretations and ideas of proper conduct as well as the personal charisma of individual students. These are informal hierarchies of achieved and unstable statuses, which must be tended through continuously “doing the right thing.” As such these foremost among equals resemble the Melanesian Big-Men (Sahlins 1963) who through their own conduct rise to become leaders.

The system of authorisations and certifications to teach is a formal status system within the Ashtanga yoga community, although it is not all too clear to most students what it takes to attain these rankings. Being certified is ranked above being authorised and authorisations can be given to teach only the first series or first and second, that is: there is level one and level two authorisations. This is clear enough, what is unclear on the other hand, is what it takes to be granted these statuses. A certain proficiency in *asana* practice is needed, and also having been in Mysore a certain number of times, and staying for a certain period of time. What the needed proficiency and length of stays actually is, on the other hand is not made clear as

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

when someone is granted the titles seems to vary from person to person. Some have come three times, and others many more. Sharath, and earlier Guruji, decides when someone is ready, and in addition to the criteria mentioned above, there seem to be a need for a certain attitude and dedication to the practice. Sharath knows when someone is ready, but what he judges this readiness from is debated among the students. Asking to be authorised is not permissible, and though some might feel that they are bypassed, these people are not very vocal about it within the community. Rumours are abound though, about who’s next in line, who is disappointed about being left out, who is eager to be recognized, and who are worthy candidates. The lack of tangibility in the criteria for getting a diploma is one thing that makes people exert themselves in the practice, as this and coming regularly to Mysore, are the only things that each and every student themselves can control to some degree. Being authorised is also important in Ashtanga circles worldwide as an authorisation is a badge of recognition that testifies to the holder’s ability in the practice and as a teacher. Getting an authorisation or a certification gives authority, is a sign of relative seniority within the community, and also heightens the market value of the teacher, as this is the only specified and recognized ranking system with Ashtanga. As the only known way to get these recognitions is repeated and extended trips to Mysore and working hard and gaining proficiency in the practice, people return every other year and do their best on the mat in Mysore as well as back home. Nevertheless, being (in the first place) authorised should not be the outspoken goal for travelling to Mysore as “having the correct attitude” is a central notion within the practice. The practice should be done for the sake of the practice, and an authorisation should not be a goal, but rather a surprising recognition of dedication and loyalty.<sup>85</sup>

As such, the elite thinking (or the sense of elites), as well the upkeep of group difference, in yoga is segmentary, in a Gluckmanian sense (Gluckman 1960). The yoga practitioners of the world, who practice different styles of yoga, will join together against attacks on yoga as practice, as will be seen in the debate about the 2012 New York Times article “How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body” (Broad 2012a)

---

<sup>85</sup> During my 2009 stay in Mysore, there was some changes in the ways one becomes a recognized, i.e., recognized by KPJAYI, Ashtanga teacher. Sharath has introduced a teacher training course, the first of which were held in 2009. This is open to intermediate students. Another change introduced around this point is the need for authorised teachers to come to Mysore regularly to keep their authorisation. Certified teacher cannot lose the certificate. Counting certified teachers on the official list (<http://kpjayi.org/teachers-directory/>), there were only 35 by August 17<sup>th</sup> 2012.

and its aftermath, which I will return to in Chapter 9 (see AYNY 2012, Broad 2012a, Kaivalya 2012 and Keil 2012). As yoga practitioners stand together as followers of the truth against (at least most) non-practitioners, ashtangis stand against followers of other yoga paths, which are also ranked, of course, according to the tastes and presentiments of each individual practitioner. As has been shown, though, there are sympathies, personal attachments and “kinship” between different styles of yoga. These boundary transgressions might, like the case is with ethnic identity according to Barth (1969), be responsible for the continued antagonism and emphasize fundamental differences. On the other hand, these boundary crossings and “friendly relations” ensure “peace in the feud” (Gluckman 1960) as students sample different yoga styles, see their worth and oppose the most “elitist and egoistic” practitioners. Inside the Ashtanga yoga community, there is a very fluid hierarchy (or perhaps rather several fluid hierarchies) based on dedication, achievement, attitude, affiliation and renown (each of which are ascribed by both self and others). It all depends on which differences which make a difference in which situation (paraphrasing Bateson 2000d), and though there are certain ideals, the boundaries that are drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour depend on who does what when. This fluidity can create uncertainties and tension among the students, but it can also defuse tension, since, apart from senior teachers, no one can really know anything for sure. This is enhanced by the refrain of the “personal practice”. Thus discord and animosity is usually under-communicated, or reserved for backstage settings (Goffman 1990), where steam can be let off, and tempers and unyogic behaviour checked, like Alf and Cherry’s chat at the coconut stand. Thus, the fellowship of the Ashtanga family is upheld and developed partly by checking one’s own behaviour, and partly by defusing others’ behaviour. Delimitations, thus, happen partly through comparison. By characterising other yoga methods and other Ashtanga practitioners, each yoga student communicates something about his or her own practice – both how they perceive it and how they want it to be.

Number of trips to Mysore, length of stay and general conduct, can all be viewed as regulative aspects or symbols (Krogstad 1989) in Mysore. Regulative symbols (or rather the regulative aspects of symbols) (Krogstad 1989) are directed inwards, and can regulate and govern behaviour within a group of people. Having spent much time in Mysore lends the student a certain status within the community, especially if paired

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

with the right way of conveying this. As the only formal statuses within the Ashtanga yoga community are being “authorised” and “certified”, these things become instrumental in establishing (informal) hierarchies and lines of influence. Having the right or the wrong attitude will, to certain degrees, compensate these standings. The norms of conduct are socially established, and somewhat fluid, and are also commonly guided by authorities like Guruji, Sharath, the “Yoga Sutras” or other texts, as well as esteemed international teachers. These sources are interpreted on different levels, and the interpretations might change. For instance, Sharath, experienced teachers and students might all interpret the sayings of and anecdotes about Guruji, but these interpretations have different weight, and will be reinterpreted in later situations. There is partly a mechanism of “self-censorship” where people talk themselves down, and unyogic behaviour, like telling someone off, that leads to self-critique. Additionally, there are also social sanctions like gossiping (which often leads to self-critique on the gossipers’ hand), and talk of unyogic behaviour, though it is seldom specified to particular people. Others’ unyogic behaviour, and subsequent talk of it, might just as well make others fall in line, rather than have an effect upon the instigator of that behaviour. One important reason for this is, I think, the outspoken rule of minding one’s own business and just doing one’s own practice, which makes being too judgemental about other’s actions suspicious in itself (and thus prone to sanctions).

The unclear and unpronounced criteria for attaining rank, the social regulations of behaviour – both one’s own and other’s – and especially the uncertainties of becoming authorised, all work to control and regulate behaviour in the Ashtanga community. When you cannot know for certain whether or not you will become authorised, and do not even have a clear idea of how it happens, the only thing that can be done is to keep travelling to Mysore, showing up and doing your best. Keeping in line, and trying to follow the precepts that are laid down in the “scriptures” and by Sharath and the senior teacher’s interpretations of the practice are important, since mastering *asanas* is not enough. *Their*, especially Sharath’s, authority is cemented as they guard the ladder of ascension within the community. Sharath is the one who authorises, and the teachers are the ones who know how to decipher the teachings of Ashtanga and have attained the ranks themselves, which in itself is proof that they know what the practice is all about. Being at the mercy of their teachers in matters of

advancing in the practice, or at least receiving visible markers that they do in the form of a new *asana* or being authorised, the students should just surrender and continue practicing. The yoga apprentices gradually develop competence and sensitivity in matters concerning the Ashtanga practice, as they internalise and embody both the *asana* practice, and the governing values and knowledge that make the physical practice significant in terms of the wider aspects of yoga. They gradually learn to interpret their own experience in line with the teachings. As shown, one important lesson is to downplay and under-communicate one's ambitions in order to rise within the hierarchies of the practice. Becoming authorised is not valued as a motivation for visiting the Shala, and self-aggrandisement is usually deemed unyogic. Such attitudes and behaviour can be interpreted as matter-out-place (Douglas 2002) within the Ashtanga family. I will turn to the body and internalisation in the following chapter, while precepts of the practice and ideas of yogic behaviour will be dealt with in Chapter 6. I now will turn to the body in Ashtanga, and show how the yoga body is enacted in the physical practice and how this enactment can be foundational in transforming the practitioners and their life-worlds.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## 5: My sore body: Yoga and the enactment of body in Mysore yoga

The beauty of the men and women practicing in the Shala is striking. They stroll leisurely around Gokulam, seemingly at ease with the heat, dust and noise. Harmonious. Upright postures, not an ounce of excessive fat. They lounge on the floor at Santosha, sitting cross-legged and straight-backed. Effortless. Scantly clad, tanned, fit bodies line the pool at Regaliis.<sup>86</sup> Most of the students have flat stomachs and well-defined long muscles that are neither too big, nor too small. All perfectly balanced. Sometimes, when I see someone with a few extra kilos, I actually catch myself thinking: Why are they here? Do they practice? Then I realize that they are the “real” people, with “normal” bodies. A girl I met in Gokulam actually complained, half jokingly, that her ass had disappeared because of the practice. Her boyfriend did not like that her ass had disappeared, so she ate as much ghee and fat as possible. This girl was an exception because of *what* she ate and *why*, but, like most others, she was highly conscious of what she put in her body. Often conversations turn to food, diets – whether it is vegetarian, vegan or raw food – and cleansing. You cannot help but think that these people are in control of their bodies, and thus, their lives. Though, they seem disciplined and carry their beauty with relaxed ease, you start suspecting that they actually care very much about their looks.

Both the body as concept and actual bodies are almost omnipresent in the yoga community in Mysore, and the body in yoga practice is the topic of this chapter. I will delve into the physical experience of yoga practice and how it can be transformative, not only physically, but also how it can alter the fundamental inclinations and the life-worlds of the practitioners. I will show how the body and its abilities become powerful symbols in yoga practice, and can represent both physical and spiritual standing. The body is the tool with which the practice is executed, and an object that is moulded by practicing. In yoga, the yoga body is enacted (Mol 2002) and the body becomes an arena where different notions of yoga as practice are negotiated and

---

<sup>86</sup> In yoga circles Regaliis is also widely known by its former name, Southern Star.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

unfolded. These negotiations are sometimes challenging and not always successful as bodies and personal dispositions are not always compatible with the standards set by the methods of different yoga styles. This will be a foundation for looking into modern notions of body and health in Chapter 7.

Here I will thematise different views of body as an aspect of yoga practice. The body is important not just because the practice is a physical endeavour of linking postures – some of which are demanding in themselves – in a sequence, but also because the body is the basis for our experience in and of the world. We are embodied beings (Merleau-Ponty 2002). The embodied physical practice of *asana* is often the starting point for delving into yoga as a whole, as well as the foundation of the Ashtanga family as a community of practice. For some yoga is a spiritual practice, for others a lifestyle. Nevertheless, the body plays an important part in these often more holistically oriented attitudes to “yoga”. What all yoga students – and all other human beings – have in common, is body.

The body becomes a complex entity in yoga practice, as it is both a tool with which the practice is achieved and a “product” of the practice as the body changes, and even as it is (re-) created in several ways due to the practice. The body, or we as bodies, is both the subject that does the practice, and an object that the practice – especially, but not exclusively the *asana* practice – evolves around. The yoga body, as well as the *asana*, manifests (Fyhn 2011) through the practice – it is enacted on and off the mat. In yoga the body is paradoxical, as the physical practice should not be the central element of “a yoga practice” according to the yoga philosophy and its most “serious” practitioners. Yet, the body – and the *asana* practice – is the most tangible element in the practice, and it is easy to get lost in the bodily processes. Even when the students distance their practice from its physical benefits and its bodily impact, the body and its physicality are established as points of orientation.

The ways the body is talked about as being bent, lifted, inverted and twisted, and (by these means) rediscovered, reinhabited, reconnected to the mind, changed, and thereby a tool for further and “deeper” change, are indicators of the importance of the body in the practice, as well as in the daily lives of the practitioners. The body gets sick, injured, healed, becomes healthy, and, finally, should be transcended. All these



aspects are tied to the physical practice of yoga *asana* by the students. “Yoga” – in all its aspects – is physically experienced and embodied. In the following section, I will look further into the interconnections of both the physical experience and the social environment of the practice, and how the experience of (physical) change can be a platform and motor for transformations of oneself and one’s surroundings.

### The Body in yoga practice: Reconnections, awareness and unfolding meaning

Practicing yoga for the sake of one’s health, a firm body, or enjoyment is not the right approach. (Jois 2002: 26)

Unfortunately, both Indic and Western practitioners of Hatha-Yoga do not always respect the spiritual goals or even the ethical foundations of this approach and often tend to pursue Hatha-Yoga as a kind of calisthenics or body cosmetics. (Feuerstein 2001: 29)

In being an overtly physical endeavour, the body is in extreme focus in *asana* practice, and may be even more so in the physically demanding Ashtanga practice. In Ashtanga the body is fundamental. It is perhaps the foremost inroad to and tool available for undertaking the journey to *Samadhi*. The *asana* practice itself fosters great awareness of one’s own body. Without body, there would be no practice, and without mastery of the body, it would be much harder to make further spiritual advances up the eight-fold ladder. As the two quotations above indicate, there is an inherent danger of becoming too focused on the body and the physical aspects of *asana* practice. You should master the body, but the body should not master you. Pattabhi Jois (2002) and Feuerstein (2001), as well as many of the students travelling to Mysore, acknowledge this danger.

The body is important, though, and when interviewing Anthony, a Canadian yoga teacher on his first trip to Mysore, about his practice he says that he views the body as a tool:

Definitely the body to me is a... It’s a tool, and it’s a very easy tool cause it’s external, you know. It’s mind, there’s the body, and then there’s what ever you want to call it, soul, spirit. And the body, it’s just so tangible, it’s so external, you can see it. Minds... mind is still external, it’s still physical, but it’s a... but it’s different. It’s not as tangible as... as... it’s not as

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

tangible as the shoulders here, that kind of stuff... so it makes the physical body really interesting tool, a really nice guide to see what’s happening. Cause it’s so right in front of you.

Compared to the mind or the soul, or other parts of the self, the body is very tangible and external, and as such it is more easily manipulated and monitored. He continues:

Yeah, why, I think it’s all connected, like the whole three connection of the body, the mind... and then the body... as the body gets stronger, the mind gets stronger, as the body gets more clean, the mind gets clean. But it also goes into you environment as well, your living environment. So if you are living in a space that’s also very cluttered, then you clean out that space, I believe this will also have an impact on the mind. And same with the body, if you clean up the body, and you make the body stronger, this will also have an impact on the mind and make the mind more focused and the mind stronger.

The body becomes the entrance to changing and strengthening other parts of the self. Through physical changes and bodily empowerment, the practitioner can also gauge the “progress” he or she feels him/herself to be making in other aspects of the practice and life. As such, the body becomes very important, but also secondary, as the change in the entire being is seen to be the real goal. The body, in being experienced as more tangible and clearly visible becomes the handle that can steer change in the other, and in some ways more fundamental, parts of the being. Cleaning up the clutter in one’s body is seen as a way of taking control over both the mind and the environment. While the mind and the soul are evasive entities, the body can be bent to ones will.<sup>87</sup> Jennifer’s view of the *asana* practice as a “training ground” for life in general parallels this:

So I think, not only that in the daily way, but also just in poses, like for the first time ever today I really balanced myself for fifteen whole breaths [in head stand – *sirsasana*<sup>88</sup>], and it’s like.... I just think it’s so important to have these clear and constant markers of ability to change and grow and develop, cause it’s easy to be complacent and not believe in how much, if we stay with something and we want it, we do that. And to me like, that’s why Ashtanga is beneficial for me, and the self-trust instead of deferring to people outside of me.

---

<sup>87</sup> Pun intended.

<sup>88</sup> See appendix 4 page xxxii.

The daily practice of the Ashtanga series is a yard stick that clearly shows progress (and setbacks). If a student just keeps on practicing, one day she will achieve the pose she is struggling with. At that point there are new challenges just as in life off the mat. She explains further:

It's you practicing what you want to or are ready to bring to the whole of life. Which makes it seem almost like saying a prayer at the start of the day, except less religious - like instead of saying "may I be healthy and happy etc.," you like physically act out how you wanna live and use your mind in a way that you want to, in the hope that it'll extend to the rest of your day and the rest of your life and maybe even the people around you.

The practice, in her view, is a microcosm of the rest of the day and the rest of life, telling herself and her surroundings what she wants to be and become. The *asana* becomes not only a metaphor for her life, but also an enactment of what the rest of her life should be like. As such the physical exercise that is the daily practice embodies one's wishes for the rest of one's life, and the physical progress and change in and of the body become markers of this ability to change, which can serve as inspiration on other arenas.

Processes of reconnection and growing ability and awareness are individual as every body is unique. On his first trip to India, George was studying at KPJAYI and had a bad experience. He is now studying and teaching at a shala where an individual focus is highlighted. When talking about the students coming to Mysore to study yoga, and the mastering of the body, he says:

Students who have come here, who've already mastered their bodies in a different activity, lets say gymnastics or dancing. I think a lot of Ashtanga practitioners have come from a dancing background. So some people have come, never practiced or practiced just a little bit of yoga and Ashtanga, would go through... of first, second, third and fourth series in a few months. But not anyone can do that. How do you bring somebody [with no background in physical activity] into yoga to master their bodies like that person did before they came? So they can go through the Ashtanga - open up, one, two, three, four, five, six series.

Me: It's quite interesting because a lot of people have no connection to their bodies. With verbal instructions, like: "Place your left hand on your right foot" and they can't do it. They don't know which hand, which foot. So there's a large disconnection.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

George: Yeah, and a teacher, a master, that would observe that would know how to... would first of all know that, and then teach that person, without even saying “I’m going to teach you how to bring attachment”. Would teach that person how to develop that without the student’s knowledge. For example, for me, my teacher, before I started going deep into *asana* practice with him, he’s observed me practice a little bit, and he has observed my body. And he says, from the waist down I’m totally disconnected to the bottom of my body. I have no control, no awareness of it. He goes: My upper body, I would be able to do anything in terms of yoga. And I can say... I have developed a lot of awareness of my body through the practices that I’ve been doing.

George had the experience of being reconnected to his own body. He has developed awareness through the practice. According to him, a good teacher should be able to facilitate this kind of awareness and feeling of mastering in everybody – or perhaps better, every body – independent of point of departure. George seems to be saying that being aware of the body throughout the practice might, in itself, not be enough. Often there is a need for being told what to be aware of and how. A teacher can point a student’s awareness in the right direction, so to speak, and say what can be done to achieve the desired results.

By mastering the body and creating awareness, problems can be felt more acutely and deeply, and thus, dealt with. But this is not a purely positive thing. Practitioners learn to listen to the body and the body becomes more sensitive to subtle changes, thus, aches and pains might also become more vivid. As Andreas, a Swedish student, says:

Yes, but at the same time... Partly I feel that it is so darned, how to put this... It is unapologetic, so if I don’t do yoga for a while, I feel bad. And I couldn’t feel that difference before, but now I do. And there is also, if I don’t do yoga for two or three days, I can feel guilty. That, why haven’t I kept it up, I should have done that. And I feel much more sensitive, that is, I kind of... Everything is more sensitive. More, I guess, aware of what goes on with my body and such things. To drive a car for a long time, like I did, and sit like this \*lifts his shoulders to his ears and rounds his back\*. Which I didn’t have before. My body was much more robust, but it isn’t anymore... It is much, much more calibrated. I have to keep up the exercise, so it becomes a kind of self... Kind of thing that has to be kept up, and at times I can get very disturbed by that. What the fuck is this all about. Let me be! [My translation from Swedish]

As we see, this sensitivity is not only physical, but it also has mental aspects. The impact of everyday life on the body is more acutely felt. The lack of practice over a few days makes the body tighten and also makes Andreas feel bad and irritated.<sup>89</sup>

Mastering and connecting to the body are ideally the main objectivities of *asana* practice. Through doing the *asanas* you get to know your own physicality and the limits of your own body, and the physical experience of the practice is the basis for learning yoga. Learning to recognize and “translate” spoken instructions into physical actions and movements takes time, and the students need to be aware and connected to their bodies. Having taught some yoga myself, I have made some interesting observations while instructing people in *asanas*. Telling a class to lift their right foot and catch the big toe with the right hand, surprisingly made many students lift their left foot. What has been even more surprising is that a few students caught the toe of the left foot with the right hand.<sup>90</sup> These people seem very unaware of and disconnected from their bodies. There is a lack of connection between the upper and lower body and a lack of coordination. In both teaching and learning yoga, the body is the main instrument through which the practice is conveyed. The teacher’s ability to read the students’ bodies and adjust them accordingly are part of what makes a good yoga teacher, so as to make the students *feel* what parts of the body should be engaged. Through continued practice, the students are gradually embodying knowledge and learning by doing. There is a simultaneous and important notion of teaching as transmission – not expounding theoretical knowledge, but a transfusion through common practice and embodied understanding. I have been adjusted in postures I have been struggling to perform. Sometimes by being helped physically into the pose, and at other times just by the tip of a finger on some muscle, I have realized what I have been doing wrong, or what I have to do to get deeper in the pose. Hands-on adjustments are usually central in teaching, and through being physically manipulated into poses, the students are getting an embodied experience of how the postures should feel. As such, the personal practice of Ashtanga yoga unfolds continuously, not only by listening to and being aware of one’s own body, but also in

---

<sup>89</sup> This confession is similar to Alf becoming an asshole when he doesn’t practice, which I wrote about in the previous chapter.

<sup>90</sup> It could of course be claimed that this is just a problem of not knowing left from right, but if that was the case, wouldn’t they still use the limbs on the same side of the body?

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

a constant interchange with a teacher who guides this awareness, thus becoming a part of doing the practice, and reflecting upon the feedback that it gives.

As you are continually admonished to be aware of and to feel your body in the postures, practicing creates an awareness of the body and how it works. The postures are to be felt, rather than seen,<sup>91</sup> and you become your own spectator, directing the gaze inwards instead of outwards. The *dristis* are to calm your mind, bringing you *into* the practice instead of trying to follow what everybody else is doing. Even soreness can be helpful in such a discovery as it highlights certain areas.<sup>92</sup> As Andreas remarks, however, this awareness can also make the body and its physicality claim too much attention as the students become more perceptive of aches, pains and subtle changes. The body starts functioning in a different way. It is not something that just carries you around anymore, but is made up of arms, hands, legs, feet, muscles, bones, ligaments and joints, all acting together in a coordinated fashion. A different body is enacted and brought into being as the yoga practice is appropriated. In this vein, a yoga student might become rather attached to his or her body. The goal, however, according to yoga philosophy is to transcend this attachment and gain detachment. Detachment in yoga is often sought by “pushing through” attachment, mastering the body, and thus not being hindered by one’s own physical limitation.<sup>93</sup>

Detachment from the material body is among the reasons for doing *asana* practice, according to George:

[Doing *asana* practice], for me, for my personal experience it’s to get so deep into my body. Get so deep in the physical practice that eventually I won’t be attached to it anymore. So I won’t have... I won’t be sitting in mediation, thinking, “My hips could be more open. Maybe I

---

<sup>91</sup> Different from fitness centres and gyms (Sassatelli 2010), few yoga studios, according to my own experience, have mirrors in the practice areas. This might be to discourage overt focus of external appearance, and the kind external monitoring of movement that is encouraged in fitness centres.

<sup>92</sup> As an aside I found it funny reading about Oddvar Stenstrøm in *Morgenbladet* 27. Nov 3. Des 2009 (Årgang 188, nr 47). When asked why he started doing yoga he answers (in Norwegian), “Jeg hadde lyst til å prøve noe nytt. De sa det var så tøft. Det er nesten bare jenter der. Du skal puste på bestemte måter. Så skal du komme i kontakt med deler av kroppen du ikke visste om. Det er muskler du ikke visste at fantes. Den viktigste muskelen er visst magemuskelen” (11). Stenstrøm, according to the article, does “advanced energy yoga” every Tuesday. My point is that when you get in touch with parts and discover muscles you didn’t know existed, the body becomes something new, something different from what it used to be.

<sup>93</sup> The apparent paradox in this notion might be “solved” in the Klein bottle movement of mutual permeation (Brody 1971; Rosen 1994; Rapoport 2011). I will return to this concept and its implications.

should practice more hip opening. Man I wish I can be... one handed hand stand, in full lotus". I'm still attached to my body. How can I sit, how can I do *pranayama* and sit. I can't even talk about what there is, how deep you can go, cause I haven't experienced it. I can't sit freely, because I have too much attachment to my body. So I'm going deep into my attachment to my body, so I can eventually get away from my body, so I don't have to... so I won't have that...

Here the body is sought transcended in a more immediate way than by giving it up completely and "move on in spirit". By mastering the body to the fullest you can detach from it and focus on the more pressing and fundamental matters of *pranayama* and meditation without the body giving you any trouble. Instead of denial of the body, and thus, material reality, as seen in some ascetic traditions, both in Western cloisters and Eastern movements, Ashtanga yoga (and many other branches of the yoga family) advocates mastering the body and building it in order to be able to not be bothered by it in later stages of the spiritual journey. This statement also shows our dependence on the body in our everyday lives. We act upon the world through our bodies, and they root us in this life. Another interesting aspect in this quote is George's focus on "experience". As he has not yet experienced how deep one can go into the physical practice, he cannot really talk about it. He just knows that he is not where he wants to be, and thus, he has to go on practicing. Experience is vital for understanding, and thus, for communicating the effects of yoga. This is a prevalent view in the Ashtanga community. Yoga cannot be understood by just reading or talking about it; it has to be practiced and experienced. In seeking detachment, the body, nonetheless, becomes a measuring-rod, showing you how you are faring on the narrow path to enlightenment.

As yoga students can be acutely aware of their bodies, "body" becomes an important topic for conversations in yoga circles in general. It seems to be challenging to vocalise just how the relation to body is experienced. Helena says her yoga practice is very spiritual. Among the people I met in Mysore, she most clearly related God to her yoga.<sup>94</sup> Helena says that yoga has brought compassion for the body that she is "carrying around", and that she was "experimenting" a lot with her body and what happens in the practice, and "just quieting the mind" when she was practicing Vinyasa Flow yoga. Practicing in the Shala for a short while, she had a great time

---

<sup>94</sup> A friend of her said she had a strong yoga morality, and compared her attitude to Christian Americans, "who'll say you'll go to hell if you don't believe". I will return to some of these aspects of her practice in Chapter 8.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

with Saraswathi and they “... both went through some progress when it comes to the body that I have. She locked me in *marichyasana D*, and just... I felt her joy, and I gave her my joy.”

The ultimate goal of Helena’s yoga practice is uniting with the Spirit. She says that the goal of the soul “... that’s in this body...” is to unite with the Spirit. For Helena, then, the body seems to be a vessel that contains her mind or soul. Additionally, it is the soul that is to be reunited with Spirit, not the grosser matter of the body. The body is what her (immortal) soul resides within, only to leave it when this life ends. This seems at odds with holistic talk of yoga reconnecting body and mind, but is in line with the idea of more fundamental detachment from matter in the final yoking with everything that is the ultimate goal of “yoga”, according to the philosophy.

How the body is spoken of is interesting as it can tell us much about how the body is viewed and how the students live with and in it. Talking about body is also a way of reflecting upon and making sense of it, and is, thus, influential in how it is experienced. Though yoga, according to many of the students, reconnects body and mind, there paradoxically seems to be a separation between the body and the “I”. This way of speaking might be influenced by yoga philosophy that tells us that our mortal coils are of limited duration and to be left behind by the soul, which transcends it and travels on to a new body and towards the final liberation from materiality to ultimate unification with spirit, as Helena puts it. When Guruji died, it was said that “he left his body behind” and “his soul moved on”.<sup>95</sup> This way of talking can make us think in terms of the (we are told) Western notion of the duality of mind and matter, but the yoga/Indian/Eastern notion is different. (e.g., Yuasa 1987)

This idea of reconnecting body and soul might, perhaps, also be central to understanding the student’s spiritual experiences in yoga practice. Csordas (2004, 2009) claims that “Alterity is the phenomenological kernel of religion” (2004), and that the source of religious consciousness is the immanence of the sense of Otherness. The experience of body and mind being reconnected presupposes a sense of “disconnectivity”, or a sense of being something different from what one is supposed

---

<sup>95</sup> This is, of course, mirrored in such mundane “Western” phrases of dying as “passing on” or “moving on” as well.



to be. This can be a sense of the body as alter, or of the alter within the body. Being reconnected is becoming *oneself*, or being one's alter. Or alternatively: They stop being one's alter, and become Self. Either way it is an embodied sense of Otherness, and one is altered through the yoga practice. Our bodies are both a part of and alien to us (Robbins 2009).

Writing about art as experience, John Dewey (1958), claims that both doing something and reflecting upon it – doing and undergoing as he denotes it – are vital for having a real experience. That is: there is a difference between experiencing something and having *an* experience. What is *experienced* runs its course, and is both interwoven in and demarcated from other experiences in the stream of experience (Dewey 1958: 37). These experiences become *significant*. In Dewey's view, doing is not enough, in having a real experience. There has to be some reflection upon the doing. The *undergoing*, which to some degree is part of all experience (Dewey 1958), might be said to be the feedback the doer receives from the doing. These two elements of an experience are linked by perception. A total experience is thus, according to Dewey, the “mutual adaptation” between self and object until they merge (1958: 45). The *asana* practice can be interpreted as making up the *doing* side of Dewey's (1958) notion of a real experience. On the mat the students go through their sequences and physically get a feel of the postures and what they do to their bodies as well as their minds. As the practice is felt, reflected upon and thought about, it is *undergone* – its consequences are scrutinized. This, of course, starts on the mat as the students dip in and out of concentrated practice and a more self-conscious or reflective practice. When the action – the practice or parts thereof, like relaxing or tensing a particular muscle – and its consequences – what the practice or “muscle action” does – are balanced, the doing-undergoing sequence comes to a close, and the significance of experience is perceived, and can be fed into new action. Thus, a yoga practice can “evolve”, “deepen” and unfold as the experience of the practice is made significant and understood.

This duality between *doing* and *undergoing* is actually echoed by experienced practitioners, as when Eddie Stern, when visiting Oslo and teaching at Puro said, “In

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

yoga, there has to be effort, but there also has to be receptivity.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, according to Stern, yoga practitioners should work hard, but also be aware of what happens during the practice. The students should reflect upon and *undergo* (Dewey 1958) their practice outside their mats, significantly also through conversation, where they in the aftermath of the practice and with the help of others can come to terms with the meaning of the (physical) practice.

The yoga practice is, as I have shown, said to reconnect the students with their own bodies, or to create a reconnection between body and mind. They become aware of their bodies, and they rediscover their bodies and their physicality. They reinhabit their bodies. During the *asana* practice the body is used and enacted (Mol 2002) in new and different ways. It is twisted, turned up side down, bent, and lifted. The student gains new perspectives on his or her body, the body is experienced differently, new strain is experienced and thus new insight and knowledge of one’s own body might be gained. Shilling (1993), by way of Giddens (1990) claims that:

... the greater the knowledge we gain about our bodies and how to control them the more is our certainty undermined about what the body is and how it should be controlled. In the conditions of high modernity, our notion of the body is regularly re-examined and reformed in light of new and incoming information that is gained about the body and its changing limits and boundaries. Knowledge about the body rejoins its subject matter, having the effect, in principle, of altering the body (Giddens, 1990). (Shilling 1993: 183)

Though, Shilling (1993) writes about what he claims is a growing feeling of the lack of control in high modernity, and the re-examination and incoming information he writes about are largely due to technological advances, this can shine some light on yoga practice as well. Yoga can be a way to seek control in these uncontrollable straits of time. Additionally, according to my interpretations, yoga can be seen as a re-examination of the body and its significance. When practicing yoga, there is a wealth of incoming information about the body. Yoga practice, in all aspects of the practice, unfolds new knowledge about the body, and thus also alters the body as the knowledge and new meanings are somatised, or “rejoins its subject matter”, as Shilling (1993) formulates it.

---

<sup>96</sup> Eddie Stern in led class, Oslo, May 11, 2011.

Physical manipulation of the body by *asana* practice, and introspection throughout the practice, can create consciousness of these taken for granted processes, and change our connectedness to our bodies. We are fundamentally aware of our bodies by proprioception, i.e., the unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation arising from stimuli within the body itself. Judith Kovach (2002) claims that this proprioception is where we become aware of our own bodies:

Consequently, in our proprioceptual response to force – especially in our species-specific struggle against gravity – we are made aware of our own body’s mass and unified physicality. These two features of proprioception, in its larger sense – its inward intentionality and the physicality of its referent – mark it as a distinct mode of awareness, one that references the discrete interiority and forceful materiality of our own substantive and subjective embodiment. (Kovach 2002: 949-50)

Becoming more conscious and sensitive to the fundamentalities and materiality of our own bodies creates a potential for an altered way of enacting body. Changing our habitual behavioural patterns, and being attentive to our bodies, might give rise to new experiences (Jackson 1983). New physical input, and new experiences are embodied, and thus the body changes. Being aware of these changes, reflecting upon them, and also by gaining a double perspective (Bateson 2000; Bohm 1995) of being in and outside the practice, knowledge of and insight in the workings of the body is gained. Through the movement between doing and undergoing, (Dewey 1958) there is a real experience of the body, and knowledge of one’s own body is unfolded (Bohm 1995). These changes in perspectives happen on the mat as the students do and undergo the practice, or as they shift between concentration/flow and reflection/conscious practice. The double view is also represented in the movement between the practice on the mat, and the reflection afterwards. Much reflection and “sense-making” is done, for instance, in conversation with other students. Through reflection, the physical experience of the practice is made significant, and this significance is made relevant and somatised when taken back to the *asana* practice on the mat. Thus, this is a process of soma-significance (Bohm 1995).

Soma-signification is David Bohm’s (1995) notion of the relationship between the physical and the mental. Rather than “psychosomatics”, which implies that there are

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

two distinct entities – the soma and the psyche, as with Descartes’s duality between mind and matter – Bohm’s (1995) notion emphasizes the fundamental unity of soma and significance. They are two aspects of, or arbitrary cuts in, one undividable reality. Significance, or meaning, is subtler than soma, which is more manifest, but subtle and manifest are relative terms, and that which is manifest on one level is subtle on another, much like context can be content (Bohm 1995), or a figure can become ground in gestalt psychology.

It is worth nothing though, as Sassatelli (2006), writing about fitness culture, urges that it is actually the centrality of the notion of mind-body dualism, and the significance attached to it, that makes the idea of reconnection valuable in exercise culture. As she writes:

It is precisely the conception of a separation and an opposition between self/mind and body that makes possible the continual attribution of extraordinary value to those specialized spaces that, like the gym, propose themselves as possible means of putting them back together again. (Sassatelli 2006: 261)

So, though Bohm’s (1995) theory of soma-significance is vital in interpreting the students’ understanding of the relationship between mind and body, their way of talking about the body, attachment, detachment and change, we have to remember that the *idea* of separation between mind and matter is prevalent, which sometimes makes their statements somewhat paradoxical. This is also somewhat enhanced by various Indian and Hindu theories and ideologies of mind and matter, which are not necessarily compatible, but the students, nonetheless, appropriate them.

The practices body forth the significance of the practice, but in bodying forth these ideas, the significance is also somatised “back into” the body, which can thus be altered. There is a constant process of soma-significance and signa-somatic movements, whereby a balance or harmony between the intention behind the act and the result is sought. Until balance is found, the intention and the act is adjusted according to the significance or feedback it receives. Bohm (1995) points towards Piaget’s theories on childhood development, where the child acts by certain intentions and receives feedback – in the form of consequences of actions – from the

environment that are incorporated in further intentions, until a “satisfactory fit is obtained between intentions and their consequences...” (Bohm 1995: not paginated). The intentions and significance we make of our actions run from the totality of our knowledge and experience, and are not necessarily conscious. Soma-significance and signa-somatic movements are both directed inwards and outwards, and in these processes, meaning is unfolded (Bohm 1995). In the case of yoga, practice is mostly undertaken with some kind of idea or intention as to what is to be achieved. In enacting the practice, somatically, sense is made both internally – by physical feedback – and in interchanges with the environment – for instance by adjustments or comments by the yoga instructor – against the background of knowledge and expectations of the practice. This feedback is either in accordance with or not fitting the expectations. As the practice deepens, or in Bohm’s (1995) terms becomes subtler, and more understanding is achieved, these expectations and the knowledge and personal experience upon which they are based are expanded. Meaning is still unfolded into ever more subtle levels through the same processes of soma-signification. Thus a yoga practice is altered and adjusted in accordance both with the “internal” and “external” feedback that is received in the practice and the significance is internalised and incorporated – somatised – into further practice. The practice is both made manifest and becomes subtler as each student is made able to perceive, or make sense of the finer details of both his or her own body and Ashtanga yoga as an idea. The increasing subtlety also means that the unfolding of a personal practice is never ending, as there are ever more to be made sense of. These personal processes are not merely personal though, but are also part of the larger whole of Ashtanga yoga as a practice and philosophy. As the processes of soma-signification and signa-somatisation reaches beyond the individual body – for instance in the interactions between student/disciple and teacher/guru or between different students – the whole of Ashtanga is inevitably influenced, though often just minutely or to a limited degree. Sometimes though, a single person can have an immense impact on any given practice, an obvious example being Pattabhi Jois himself.

Soma cannot be divorced from significance (Bohm 1995), and whatever meaning we make, it depends on the “... totality of our somatic structures, and therefore from what we are” (1995: not paginated). Who we are rests on the totality of meanings that works within us. These meanings for the most part have their source in society as a

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

whole (Bohm 1995), and each one of us takes up his or her unique combination of these “societal meanings”, meaning that each person is different. The meanings we embody change throughout each person’s lifetime though the adjustment of existent meanings, but if older sets of meaning do not conform, new meanings can be perceived (Bohm 1995). As such older meanings might either be experienced to have limited validity, or might be placed in new context, and thus, take on new meanings. Vitaly though: “Recalling that meaning is an intrinsic part of reality, we see that such perception of new meaning constitutes a creative act” (Bohm 1995: not paginated).

Thus, perception of new meaning alters the lived reality of a human being (Bohm 1995), and the old and new reality are divided. This can be seen in the stories of massive change due to practicing yoga. The yoga student experiences new realities, or rather, when the yoga students perceive something differently, a fundamental change has already occurred. Bohm’s (1995) theories are compatible with and strengthen the foundations of Dewey’s (2005) theory on experience, and the phenomenological notions of being-in-the world and embodiment.

Massive change can be seen in Murphy’s (1987) account of his own paralysis. Though he writes, “... disability is defined by society and given meaning by culture...” (Murphy 1987: 4), he also describes how an altered body and changes in embodiment – the body silenced by paralysis – changes self-understanding and identity. It changes meaning and thus, his reality. He writes, “These organs, and the body itself, are among the foundations upon which we build our sense of who and what we are, and they are the instruments through which we grapple with and create reality” (Murphy 1987: 12). Thus, as the body alters, so does our sense of self and the reality in which we live.<sup>97</sup> Both the societal and personal significance of disability is unfolded in processes as described by Bohm (1995). While Murphy (1987) writes of the disembodied self, the aspiring yogis are rather becoming (re-) embodied and

---

<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, much of his ailments were at one point “written of” as psychosomatic – i.e., his mind is making his body sick where no “real” sickness is to be found. He writes, “Psychosomatic etiology is a handy residual category when standard tests fail to reveal somatic disorder” (Murphy 1987: 14). At the same time, stress has usually been said to induce ulcers, whereas new research claims that it might be the other way around: ulcers and other stomach trouble can *cause* stress and even depression. This information is rather interesting in lieu of the argument of the interconnectedness of mind and matter, rather than the deep division between the psyche and the soma.

inhabiting their bodies fuller.<sup>98</sup> Injuries are interesting in these regards. They are among other things seen as “teachers” since they necessitate viewing the practice differently, as we shall see below.

Massive change in being does not necessarily spring from big changes in body, though. In his PhD thesis, Håkon Fyhn (2011) writes that form unfolds and manifests from the formless as we change our perception (See Fyhn 2011: 307ff). Learning to turn and tune their perception to new aspects of the body in practice, the yoga practitioners can unfold and become aware of ever-subtler aspects and differences of and in their bodies. In the meeting between our own experience, or pre-understanding, and the yoga practice as a happening, realisations and discoveries, that are of such a characteristic that they need to be made account of, might manifest or emerge and thus, lead to new a understanding and further change. The wholeness is enfolded in the body, and the “parts” are unfolded as our perception is turned towards them. Unfolding onto higher levels of order is intuitive or “abductive”<sup>99</sup> (Fyhn 2011), and by directing the awareness towards what we can only have a hunch of or that which is merely suspected and not clearly perceived, the form can be unfolded from that hunch and the formless (Fyhn 2011). Something that has been *implicit* is made *explicit*. In yoga practice, the senses are tuned, and ever-subtler aspects can be unfolded. That is, as we learn to perceive new differences, new and subtler aspects of one’s own body, as well the interwoven environment, are made manifest. Changes can be subtle, and as Bohm is quoted claiming: “The subtle is more powerful.”<sup>100</sup> This implies that the impact is expanded and more powerful if one reaches higher or deeper orders (Bohm 1995, 2002; Bohm & Peat 2011). Unfolding the practice, the students might reach higher orders of practice that are far more subtle and complex wholes, adding whole new “layers” to their (already whole) practices. Imagine adding a floor plan to a

---

<sup>98</sup> Oliver Sacks (1990) tell his story of bodily trauma and subsequent change in embodiment and of identity in “A Leg to Stand on”.

<sup>99</sup> On abduction, see Fyhn 2011.

<sup>100</sup> I have not been able to find the actual source of this quote, though it has been quoted to me and reproduced several places. I have found the quote in Hoff-Leirvik (2000: 1) though he does not supply a reference. That being said, Bohm (1995, 2002; Bohm & Peat 2011) deals with this topic in several publications. As somewhat an aside, in searching for this quote I interestingly, among other things, wandered into a debate on hallucinogens on a web-page devoted to drugs and spirituality (<http://www.shroomery.org/forums/showflat.php/Number/3379145>), where the quote was dedicated to Bohm, as well as a page by a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and the Founder/President of The Mother’s Service Society, called karmayogi (<http://www.karmayogi.net/?q=subtleispowerful>) (same text: <http://www.motherservice.org/content/subtle-powerful>).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

picture of a house, and then adding the architectural drawing on top of that. They each picture the whole house, but each level adds subtlety and complexity to the understanding of what “the house” is. Adding the municipality’s drawing for sewage drains, electricity, and roads further enfolds the understanding of “a house”. As such there is an unfolding both inwards into the structure of the house “itself” and outwards “into the surroundings”. Each “movement” recreate the reality of the house, adding levels of significance of what the house *is* and *can be*. This is what the students are doing as their practices *unfold*, adding subtlety and complexity both “internally” (for instance “adding” an experience of *nadis* or energy channels) and “externally” (experiencing connection to nature, the environment, and potentially the universe/everything) in *enfolding* more and more elements as relevant and significant in the practice, and thus changing the practice.

In Bateson’s (1979/2002) terminology we can talk of feedback and calibration, and “... an alternating ladder of calibration and feedback up to larger and larger spheres of relevance and more and more abstract information and wider decision” (1979: 220). Feedback and calibration, or process and form (Bateson 1979/2002) as such follow a dialectic zigzag pattern. The very nature of perception follows this, as does learning and a host of other phenomena, according to Bateson (1979). Explaining *calibration*, Bateson (1979: 216) turns to a man shooting with a shotgun or firing a gun under the table. In refining these skills the man has to practice the act again and again, processing the result of an increasing number of attempts, “... he must adjust the *setting* of his nerves and muscles so that in the critical event, he will “automatically” give an optimum performance” (Bateson 1979: 216). Self-correction is only possible from information from “a *class* of past, completed actions” (ibid.). This indicates that “calibration” is related to “feedback” as higher logical types are related to lower, though the latter is more complex. Moving upwards in the zigzag ladder, the sphere of relevance increases. There is a change in the logical typing of the information that is collected by the sense organs. The dynamical movement up the ladder delivers higher orders. Ontologically there is an alternating calibration-feedback process that rises to higher levels of *enfoldingness*, which then is *unfolded* downwards to lower orders. There is an increasing differentiation as subtler and subtler elements are manifested, but conflated it is understood on only one ontological level.



The instrument that the yoga students are working with is their own body, and by tuning that instrument they change their bodies and thus, themselves in calibrating their actions against the feedback they get, both from within and without. The sphere of relevance can thus be unfolded from the on-the-mat practice and the feeling of short hamstrings to a “global debate”, “spiritual eternity” and “cosmic importance”. All these aspects are enfolded in the wholeness of the body in practice, though the relevance of each can only manifest as we turn our attention towards them. The body in practice is a form that gathers all the aspects in yoga, but at the same time, the yoga body is also contained in the social life of the yoga community. Throughout this thesis I shift my attention between different aspects, which are all inherent parts of yoga practice, and as my gaze lingers on each aspect, I make them manifest. At the same time, all the other aspects are part of that same whole, are contained within it, as the whole is also contained in every element.

The students find the significance and make sense of their somatic experiences and thus, unfold their personal practices. This does not happen in a vacuum, but against the background of their total experience, as well as in dialog and interchanges with teachers and other students. The practice is both personal and social, as somat-signification processes transcends the individual practitioner. Ashtanga as a practice, and the community of practice, manifests in much the same way. Injuries and the way they are dealt with in yoga practice is an interesting example of such processes of signification or sense-making.

### Injuries

*It's October 1<sup>st</sup> and a week ago I injured my left knee again, knocking up the damage that had never really healed in the first place as I wasn't able to do lotus positions and twists like in janusirsasana 3.<sup>101</sup> This time I was bouldering.<sup>102</sup> Today was my first day back at the mat. Yoga was not much fun today. My knee wasn't really bothering me throughout the standing sequence, although I could clearly feel it when it was fully stretched. The main problem came – as I had suspected – during the seated sequence.*

---

<sup>101</sup> All the *asanas* mentioned here are pictured in appendix 2, page ix.

<sup>102</sup> Bouldering means climbing on low walls without ropes. Forgetting myself at an informal contest, I got a bit too eager and enthusiastic and as I fell off a knee lock (that I probably should not have done in the first place), I probably twisted my knee. It did not hurt that much, but the day after, my knee was very stiff and sore and made me walk with a limp.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

*I didn't do ardha badha patchimattasana fully as I knew that the lotus would be out of question. I did triangmukhaykapadha paschimttasana, and then trying janusirsasana 1 I had to stop. I couldn't bring my left heel all the way in, and even keeping it at the right knee pulled painfully in the left. Skipping a lot of poses, and doing just marichiasana A and C – C also modified as pushing the knee against the right arm was uncomfortable to the knee – navasana, and upavishtakonasana before finishing. Frustrating! My left knee has been my “good knee” for a while, and although not in perfect condition, it has been getting better and slowly, slowly it has gotten back on track. Not being able to do the practice fully is frustrating, not having practiced at all for one week even more so, especially when the one practice I have done tells me that I might need to stay away for some more time. Maybe I'll try again on Tuesday, and give the old knee a rest till then.*

*With an injured knee it's easy to get frustrated. I've been frustrated since I first injured my left knee in April, making me unable to do the full practice without modifying certain poses. Now that I've reinjured that same knee, I'm able to do even less, and I'm being pulled on the one hand by the wish to practice, the restlessness, and the need to stay limber, and on the other by the knowledge that I probably need to rest and pure laziness on the other. My knee needs to be kept flexible and warm, but in doing so there is always a chance of aggravating the injury. I have a theory that the injury was made possible by a weakening in the knee because of lack of climbing, but now I to some degree have to take it easy even while climbing so as not to keep the knee injured. I know I ought to do some easy poses to open my hips, and just try to work around the knee so as to take some of the pressure off, but it is such boring work when what I really want to do is the whole Ashtanga sequence. Just doing easy workouts is too slow.*

This is an excerpt from my diary. I have included it here to show some of my own frustrations about being injured in my practice. During my practice in Mysore, I first injured my left knee in April, and then in June I injured the right. To me it was hard to not be able to do the whole practice without modifications, it didn't feel quite right. Not being able to do what I had recently done quite easily (but obviously not correctly

– if I had the injuries wouldn't have occurred I presume<sup>103</sup>) was frustrating. I felt like I was cheating or something, though who I was cheating wasn't equally clear. Anything resembling a lotus position on any of the legs brought pain to the knees. In yoga you are usually told that knee injuries are due to tight hips. When the hips are too tight, the openings occur in the knees, which are weaker than the hips, especially when you are a bit too eager and push yourself too far. When I taught I constantly reminded the students of being careful with their knees, but when it came to my own practice, I weren't able to hold back, and not even after having injured my left knee I were unable to keep from pushing on and then ending up injuring my right knee as well. When I injured my right knee it felt like it popped, and it opened "sideways" on the inside of the leg. It felt like one joint kind of rolled over the other stretching something on the inside.<sup>104</sup>

Though yoga is attributed great powers to heal and cure assorted ailments, it can also hurt and injure. Injuries can cause great setbacks, not only in the practice itself, but also be serious enough to have an impact on the injured's daily life and health in general. On the other hand, supposedly injuries are also great teachers. Injuring the body makes you realize the vulnerability, and in working around the injuries you get to know your body even better. When something you usually take for granted starts acting up you see it more clearly. This is one of the points Leder makes in "The absent body" (1990). When the body functions as "normal" it disappears, only to reappear, or rather dys-appear, when it's dysfunctional. (Leder 1990) The body becomes a thematic focus when it's "abnormal". In yoga injuries are seen as humbling and the injured person learns to love and be happy about the practice that he or she is actually able to perform. The practice takes on a different hue, or is refashioned, so to speak, where pushing yourself as far as possible takes the back seat on actually being able to practice at all. The practice you actually are able to do becomes a source of gratitude.

Martin had some revelations when he had to stop practicing yoga because of injuries. He injured his knee doing yoga, and damaged it further before having surgery. He also injured his shoulder. Between these injuries he had realized that he had to stop practicing, and though the realization hit him hard, it was not all bad:

---

<sup>103</sup> As most other yoga practitioners I blame myself for my injuries, not yoga as such.

<sup>104</sup> I have been told that it is probably the meniscus that has been damaged.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Yeah it was hard. (...) Before I made the decision that I have to stop practicing, that was the hard part. I was trying to get to terms with the idea that I’ll have to stop this. That was really difficult, you know. I didn’t want to arrive at that decision. But once I had arrived at the decision, I thought, well, it’s not the end of the world, it’s just; I have to do something different. (...) Everything doesn’t stop here, just this one thing stops here, and interestingly what I discovered was that I had neglected many areas in my life in favour of this damned Ashtanga practice, you know. I’d neglected relationships. I mean, getting a relationship with, you know, another person, with a woman. I’d just neglected it. In favour of this thing, I’d neglected like financial security. I’d neglected any idea of a career or a future. All I was concerned about was making enough money to come back to Mysore to practice some more, to get better, you know, and whilst that is good it was at the cost of other things. And my social life, and my friends, and everything. Everything had been sacrificed to the great god Ashtanga, and I realised it was too much for me, and I realised that I needed these other things in my life. When Ashtanga was gone, it was like; “oh actually, let’s open up to what else there is”, and that was a really good experience. And then as a bonus, the knee got better, with physiotherapy this [shoulder] got better, and end of 2007 a friend said; “when do you come back?” It was a bank holiday. “There’s no teacher today, it’s just open door, why don’t you just come and do a quiet practice? It will be few of us there.” I said; “fuck it! I’m gonna go.” You know. So I went. And so; “oh, wow, yeah, I can practice.” And I know that at that stage the practice was really good for this, now that this [knee] had recovered and this [shoulder] had been recovered 90%. The practice was really helping it all. But that year it was too soon to go back to Mysore. Actually I went to practice with Rolf in Goa instead, because I knew him and knew that I could do things at my own pace, and I wouldn’t feel that idiotic compulsion to push myself too hard that we here, you know. I do anyway.

Because of the practice Martin had neglected financial security, social relationships and a career. Everything he did was in some way connected to the practice and getting enough money to go back to Mysore. He just wanted to become better at doing yoga, to have progress in his practice. The injuries ended all this, and though it was hard to make the decision to stop doing Ashtanga, he rediscovered many of the things he had sacrificed. In addition to finding back to some of the things he had lost due to his focus on the Ashtanga practice, he gained a different view of the practice when he finally was able to get back into it.

Sonja, a yoga student from Finland, describes her introduction into yoga, her initial practice, and how she came to have a more healthy view of it:

I kind of started right away. Like... I don't remember exactly, but maybe like four-five times a week after maybe the first month or something like this. I kind of went into it like this \*snap[s her fingers]\*. And then... I think it was four and six times per week, like in the first year. And then also, maybe because I could do many *asanas*, the teachers gave me new *asanas*. (...) In the first year, I think I did like the primary and like one-third of the second series. So it was kind of like a fast going. But then I kind of changed teacher and I started doing only primary. Really concentrating on that more. And I kind of felt good about going forward and doing *asanas*... of course. Like \*aahh\* I like this. But I was thinking that... In gymnastics I've been doing all kind of stuff, so it's not like the physical tricks that I'm really interested [in]. Because I knew that I can do it. So I don't need to, you know? That I wanna just concentrate on more, and then the new teacher that I have, kind of made me realize that there is so many things in the primary that, you know. About *vinyasa* and what you can do in it. And I noticed that it's a little bit... It's maybe more important for me that I just do kind of easier [things] physically than to go really fast forward. And then, after one year I kind of had problem with my knee again. I think it was *marichyasana D* that I just did it too fast. And then the injured knee kind of \*click\*. It didn't brake or anything, but [a] couple of months it was really sore, and something little bit happened there. So this really stopped me for a while. That I really... I said, ok, now I have to kind of take it easy. So it was good that it happened. I think that injuries are good!

From excelling in the physical challenges of the practice because of her background in gymnastics and really diving headlong into the first two series, she first realized that there are more to Ashtanga yoga than just the *asana*. With her new teacher she rather delved into the finer aspects of the primary series, but still pushing herself too hard, she injured her knee. Though the injury was not too bad it made her realize that she had to take it easier, and not concentrate so much on the physical aspects. To her the injury was good in giving her a healthier perspective on yoga practice.

Even advanced students get injured. At breakfast one morning conversation turned to Roy, his practice and not least he injuries. Roy is a certified teacher who studied with Guruji for many years. "His tic-tacs are silent!" someone exclaimed, and then commented that he had recently started practicing again from scratch – that is from the primary series – after having been injured. It had started with a stretch or tear in the groin. One of the girls had heard that the stretch was from a motorcycle accident, where he had tried to hold the bike back. He still continued practicing, until Sharath one day told him, "There's something sticking out of your stomach." He had developed a hernia. Around the breakfast table we quickly concluded that Roy must

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

have an extremely high pain threshold! He needed surgery, though, and according to information at the table, they had used a gortex membrane to keep the wall of the stomach in place. William had heard this from Roy himself. A version at the table was that the hernia had happened suddenly doing tic-tacs, but that was quickly dismissed by one the girls, with; “No, that wouldn’t do it.”<sup>105</sup> There are several things that Roy’s injury and the conversation can teach aspiring yogis. Firstly, even though yoga students are supposed to listen to their bodies and not push themselves too much to avoid injury, there is also the statement accredited to Gururji, saying that injury is “just” the ego holding you back. There is also the notion of pushing through pain, and transcending the body. If you just continue practicing everything will work out.<sup>106</sup> Transcending the body will also take the practitioner beyond pain, and disconnect the self from the pain. That is, if a meditative state is reached, pain will be transient and not disruptive. As the story shows, the students having this conversation are in awe of Roy and his progress – both his performance of silent tic-tacs (which is very impressive) and also his ability to take pain. So even if injuries are somewhat ambiguous, they can be made sense of within the yoga universe.

If done “correctly” and with awareness of the body and one’s own limitations, as well as with detachment from ego and without thought of achievement, yoga should not be injurious. If injuries occur that would indicate that some aspect of the practice has been performed incorrectly. Thus, if the mistake can be correctly identified, great lessons can be learned. This seems to be a recurrent message in the yoga community. This constitutes an inbuilt mechanism in the practice that protects the ideal Ashtanga yoga practice from internal and external critique, and thus, the ideal is upheld. It makes it virtually impossible to “prove” that there might be something wrong with the practice as such.

According to Gururji, everybody can practice, even the old and the sick. The only one who cannot practice is the lazy person. Everybody should practice according to his or her capabilities, and not in such a way as to bring harm to him/herself. Physical injury

---

<sup>105</sup> 193205022011

<sup>106</sup> The Confluence Countdown dealt with this topic in June 2012, writing about injuries and a Dr. Marcia Whalen, who “... knows all about Ashtanga. She’s pulled me back together after a lot of problems related to the practice, and also subscribes by my motto: “There’s nothing Ashtanga can’t break that Ashtanga can’t fix.”” (TCC 14)

is seen as indicative of the practitioners mind, awareness and attitude towards his or her own body, and to yoga as a practice in general. So though injuries might be interpreted as resulting from the ego holding on and not surrendering to the practice, they are also often seen as blessings in disguise. Injuries are the bodies way to say that you are pushing too hard to do something you are not ready for, or at least that something has been done wrong. Working around injuries might also give another perspective on the practice, and so teach new – and better – ways of doing postures. Importantly such ways of finding meaning in being injured, does not question the practice of Ashtanga as such, but rather finds fault in the way it has been practiced up until the injury. Sometimes blame can be put on the teacher for pushing too hard in some adjustment, or of just not reading the student’s body well enough, but yoga as practise is usually not blamed. If injuries happen, the yoga has not been done properly, which is similar to the way the Azande blame witchcraft for conflicting answers from their oracles (Evans-Pritchard 1976; Gluckman 1960) or a scientist dismissing test results contradicting others as irrelevant “glitches” in the experiment.

#### **Disciplining the body, and the mind**

In her “Yoga School Dropout” (2005) Lucy Edge tells the story of her quest for enlightenment in India and her frustrations at the different shalas, yoga schools and ashrams she visits throughout the vast country. Her journey starts in Mysore, and she says that the students from the Pattabhi Jois Shala always win the (informal) contests of who have the most beautiful bodies by the pool at Hotel Regaliis. The reason is that the physically demanding and dynamic Ashtanga makes trim and fit bodies, and that it demands discipline and hard work. When Andreas indicated that he was trying to move beyond the physical aspects, but admitting that the body is still important, he touched upon these issues:

Definitely... Yes, it’s [the body] there, and it’s important. Partly because it is very physical/bodied... Tied to how I feel. I can very clearly see how... I can take the temperature of my body, and feel how I’m doing. Both when it comes to kind of input-output and there is kind of a... I think that is very much in my body. What it stuff my face with have consequences. When I started there was... I had a different kind of fixation of the body than today. Every kind of exercise I had done earlier, was done to look good. How you go to the gym to look good, you swim to look good. But my transformation when I was at the

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Clinique<sup>107</sup> was much about how to exercise to feel good. Instead of looking good, which... is something that can't really be done enough, when you see it. And that become negative exercise. But you always feel good after exercising. That's why it becomes a positive undertaking. So I think it all is sett on some kind of feeling; “ok, what is this supposed to be?” And it started as a form of exercise. To in some way feel how the body is doing. And I didn't think I would fall into this kind of; “One shouldn't eat too much before... Too long... Too short time before”, and these things, just “ok, ok, ok.” But you do those things, because I feel how much better it is when I practice, how much easier it is, and that made me start eating differently and at other times, and eating less candy.

So though he is practicing to feel good, he is a bit ambivalent about the way the rest of his life has changed. As the practice evolves it can take too much focus, and he continues:

And that is the great balance! Because I also see that a lot are... At least at home there is a classic Ashtangi and he is kind of a very, very, controlled pedant, who does things in a kind of blind way, and the home and cloths and everything are very, very sharp, and I recognise myself in that a bit... And that is why I pulled myself out of the Ashtanga since... “Fuck.. Fuck that!” It breeds a nerve/streak in me that becomes very uncomfortable/cruel, and this has very much to do with the body, since you can sort of trim how... You slim directly. Something happens right away when I start doing this... The first week of led primary... \*Swisth!\* I just felt my whole body just became... And it felt great! (...) [T]hat I have power over my body. I have the ability to change it, to make... Help it. This instrument you shall tune precisely. There's a lot of talk of the body as an instrument. [My translation from Swedish.]

In extension of the previous debate on bodily change and awareness in yoga practice, Andreas stresses the changes that occurred in his motivations for exercising. Before he exercised solely to *look* good, now it is more important to *feel* good. In doing exercise to look good the exercise takes on a negative hue since you will never be able to look good enough, but you will always *feel* better afterwards, which makes it a positive undertaking. Andreas' relation to his own body has changed through the yoga practice. The more challenging side of this physical sensitivity is that it can make Ashtanga practitioners controlling and pedantic in regards to eating, sleeping and other aspects of their life. The discipline that is needed to get up in the morning, practice every day, eating beneficially and going to bed early, can go “too far”, and Andreas left Ashtanga for a while because of this mean streak. Apart from the

---

<sup>107</sup> He started practicing yoga as part of the treatment when he was at a clinic for being burnt-out.



discipline that turned pedantic, turning his back on Ashtanga was also partly based on the way his *body* felt and looked, as he says; the Ashtanga is slimming – and it feels good – but this is a detour in yoga. It is interesting to note here that discipline is “needed” to be able to uphold the regime of the practice, but that at the other hand, there is the hope or goal that the practice will entail detachment as well, which is parallel to the paradox of mastering and transcending the body.

The yoga practice is an act of disciplining the body, and the mind, in surrendering (partially or fully) to the rather strict regime outlined by Guruji in his “Yoga Mala” (2002), or just getting up in the morning. Although the yoga practice is a chosen venture, it can be argued that it gains power over the practitioner and disciplines his or her body. It shapes the practitioner in a certain image, simultaneously as the practitioner enacts Ashtanga. There is discipline in surrendering to the sequence and to Sharath’s notions of when you are ready to move on to the next *asana*. The message seems to be that you are not in any position to evaluate your own “performance” and to decide.

For Anthony, the Canadian teacher, discipline is about commitment. It is committing to the Ashtanga series, committing to something outside himself and to do it even though he does not always feel like doing it. This both takes and teaches discipline, he says:

Yeah, [it] just makes the most sense for me to commit to something that doesn’t involve me... You know deciding to do this or to do that, and just to commit to a methodology and to commit to a system. And just go for it. I mean, for me that just makes sense. It’s what’s given me the most benefit, I think, than anything else I’ve done. Just through committing to that series and through committing to the practice. You know, showing up, and even though you don’t feel like doing this posture, you feel like that posture, you’re doing it in this specific way, and through that discipline I feel like I’m gonna get more out of the practice.

Anthony sees that the need to surrender to the system and the discipline of sticking to the system increase the benefits of the practice. Commitment and discipline is something that has value in itself. There seems to be a sense of purpose in just surrendering and showing up. Do the practice, believe in it, and everything will come.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Jennifer’s life is in general moving in a good direction, but she is not sure how much of this movement she can attribute to Ashtanga yoga. The discipline is something she sees as beneficial because it teaches her to be disciplined in general. And she also likes the time-out and focus she gets on the mat. As she puts it, in the practice she can step out of the sensory overload and stimulation that characterises human life these days. Apart from that, she does not really see any immediate benefits of the practice, but since it is not harming her either, she will keep practicing, and she notes:

The extremeness, I think that’s yet another thing that someone who’s gonna do anything this diligently has to have. You can’t do this unless you have a lot of discipline. You can’t do this unless you have some degree, I think, of faith in yourself almost. It’s a weird mix of like, you have to have faith in yourself, because it’s only your body and your mind [that] are gonna get through doing this, but you’re also having a faith in the directions of a system outside of you that existed before you did. But it is hard, so it’s like... if I had no belief I could ever do the pose I can’t do right now or no belief I could ever do it better than I’m currently doing it, why would I continue it. So you have to have some belief in personal ethicasy and improvement, discipline, determination, you have to be able to breath, hahahaha. I think, it’s almost like someone who looks for something really hard and challenging.

Jennifer here points to another interesting paradox regarding the discipline needed in the practice of Ashtanga yoga. The discipline is, on the one hand, tied to the faith in yourself that you can do this. It is is a discipline of the self, in making yourself go through the practice with “body and mind” because that is the only way it can be done. But, on the other hand, you need faith in the system. As well as committing to yourself, you have to commit and surrender to the system, and believe that it will be beneficial. You have to let Ashtanga discipline yourself, and tie yourself to the system through the teachers. Disciplining yourself is an act of subordination. Thus, embracing yoga requires discipline and faith. Though the discipline is hard for some, Cherry does not have such a problem:

Yeah, that was not an issue, I mean, I used to get up and run every day. So I get up and do yoga now. That’s never been an issue. My teacher had opened a studio so I opened the studio every day for eight months. Never late. Not an issue. And here, like last year when I was here, I didn’t miss a practice, like, I don’t miss practices. So when I used to travel on business I used to either go to a shala wherever I was travelling or used to practice in my hotel room. So yeah, discipline not a problem.

Andreas explicitly ties discipline to the notion of surrendering. Surrendering to the practice is as we have seen disciplining oneself, and saying: “This is what counts.” The practice will be what has the main place in my life, the rest of my life will be ordered around it. Andreas points an additional way of understanding surrendering:

I think there are two different ways to look at surrendering: One is to surrender to actually becoming disciplined. To say: “Ok, now this is what’s important, and so I will get up at a certain time, and go to bed at a certain time, and I will not eat this and this, and I will ration my energy, if you will, because the practice is so important. I will surrender to do it... It will be everything to me. And that is one kind of surrendering. The other is to actually to have a good attitude towards it all... That is, to not let it take over. It is (it is kind of not mine) kind of not a goal in itself to do a practice if it excludes everything else. To choose away social gatherings. I can’t go to a birthday dinner because it’s too late which means there is cake I can’t digest before practicing. What is the point of my yoga then? I always have to go home at nine to sleep, to get up at five. What does it give me then? And I don’t know either, kind of. It’s a natural part of my life. I can’t really take that. [My translation from Swedish.]

In Andreas view, surrendering denotes making yoga a natural part of his life. It should not be about forcing everything else into a pattern ordered around the 04.30 AM practice, implying no social life, no late dinners, a strict diet and so on. Rather it should be, like he said on another occasion, “just like brushing your teeth”, a natural part of life, something one just does.

The students and their bodies are being socialized and disciplined into the practice and its structures of meaning, and are thus, shaped by it, in the whole body-mind nexus, as apprentices in a community of practice (Lave 1991, Marchand 2008). The students learn why practicing is good, and, though they do not necessarily see any immediate benefits, they have faith in yoga and Ashtanga as a system. They see how the more advanced students fare, and – as their teachers and the more advanced students are role models – they project their own practice into the future, imagining what their own practice can amount to.

Though yoga is a personal experience, and being aware of one’s own body is an important aspect in forming the practice, it is also clear that some people have more

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

authority and more power to say what the correct practice of yoga is, as was seen in the previous chapter. Being advanced students they are *recognized* by the wider yoga community as knowledgeable and experienced practitioners, and their bodies – both on and of the mat – in some way augments this as *physical capital* (Bourdieu 1978), as

... the appearances and experiences of bodies ‘act as concrete manifestations and prototypes of “ideas” about socially appropriate bodies’ which can help sustain social divisions and inequalities. (Shilling 1993: 117)

More advanced and experienced students and teachers are asked about the meaning of certain physical experiences. They are also sought out in order to get a notion of what one should actually strive for on the mat. Thus, even the physical experience on the mat is influenced by socially established notions what a yoga practice should be like, or at least it is influenced by socially conveyed ideas of what is relevant ways of experiencing the *asana* practice. The social context of yoga, and the socially conveyed meanings of the practice have much impact on the students’ bodies as human...

Bodies develop through the interrelation between individual’s social location, habitus and taste. These factors serve to naturalize and perpetuate the different relationships that social groups have towards their bodies, and are central to the choices people make in all spheres of social life... (Shilling 1993: 130)

This means that in Ashtanga yoga, there are particular ways of relating to and manipulating the body, and that social feedback becomes a part of the process of soma-signification. As Hastrup (1995) says of anthropology, and Lave (1991) and Marchand (2008) of apprenticeships, yoga disciplines those who practice and surrender to its regimes, and thus, these practices also shape the practitioners identities alongside their bodies. The images and ways of enacting the body of yoga are naturalized and embodied through striving to live up to images that are socially transmitted. Although, we as students are constantly reminded that yoga is a highly personal and individual practice, and that all bodies are different, not having the experiences that are conveyed as “normal” can lead to feelings of failure. This was the case with George’s first experience of the Shala, which I will return to further down.

There is, thus, a double message being conveyed here. On the one hand, there is the message that “It is your practice, and you should listen to and trust your own experience”. On the other hand, the facts that there are a set sequence of postures, some experienced students who have advanced further into the *asana* practice, and teachers who are the guardians of the yoga practice, create the message that this is a practice that is the same for everyone – it is a universal practice – and thus, some are better at doing yoga than others. The more basic students strive to achieve the form practiced and experiences conveyed by those who are seemingly further advanced students, on the path towards whichever goal the basic students have set for themselves, or as Roger put it: “They cling on to Sharath’s every word.” Additionally, there are the various yoga texts, such as the “Yoga Sutras”, but these are mostly interpreted through authoritative figures such as Sharath, the philosophy and Sanskrit teacher in the Shala, Lakshmi, or by the way of some textual interpretation. As such, the interpretation of the physical experience and how the body should be treated in Ashtanga yoga as a system is socially mediated, and these

... body management norms became *internalized*. Instead of being imposed from the outside, through the threat of sanctions, codes of behaviour became adopted partly at a subconscious level to the point where they were followed irrespective to the presence of others... (Shilling 1993: 158)

The significance or meaning of the physical practice is, thus, not only reached by solitaire introspection, but is also influenced by others who have *their* meaning of the practice. As Shilling (1993) writes, these norms are not necessarily consciously adopted, but are also internalized, or somatised, if you will, by the effort to follow the teacher’s instructions on, for instance, breathing and activating certain muscles. These meanings are brought back to the mat – if they are deemed relevant by the individual practitioners – and are sought to be included and “felt” in the physical exercise. It is also important to note, though, that the physical experience of individual students might bear implications for others, especially if they are student/teachers held in high regard by others. This can be illustrated with an example where a senior teacher told us about the importance of breathing deeply. His experience of injury, which he traced back to not breathing correctly, came to have a, more or less, direct impact on the practice and physical experience of those who practiced at the studio that day, as

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

we sought to embody/somatise his ideas of breath and *bandhas*. He told us to breathe all the way down into the pelvic floor, and not to hold the *bandhas* too tight. Contracting the *bandhas* too much is a common misunderstanding in Ashtanga, he said further. As we bring our individually created and socially influenced expectations to the mat, this will have an impact on our practice, and thus, on our bodies and how they change through practicing Ashtanga yoga.

This is something Shilling (1993) points out. The body is both a biological entity and a social entity. As a social entity, “... it is important to recognize that the body is not simply constrained by or invested with social relations, but also actually forms a basis for and *contributes towards* these relations” (Shilling 1993: 13).

Social relations might be taken up in, transform and alter our embodied capacities, however they are still rooted in human bodies (Shilling 1993). In other words, ontological changes in the body alter representations, and altered representations foster ontological changes. There is not a clear-cut border between the ontological *being* and the social *representation* of the body. The human body, in the broader sense, includes aspects of social meanings of body and biological body. The physiological body is superimposed and influenced by elements of significance. As the body is perceived and conceived with meaning, this has an impact on other aspects, and the body as a whole.

As the body gets sick, injured, senses, is stretched, turned upside down, gets stronger, weaker, or more flexible, these are biological variables, but these rarely operate in isolation, as they are layered with social meaning. Not only do biological happenstance get interpreted socially, but social meanings and values can shape and alter bodily dispositions. In the long run socially valued dispositions can alter the predominant traits of groups of humans. It has for instance been claimed that modern ideals of feminine beauty, such as big breasts, slim waists and narrow hips (Cochran calling it the “...current unrealistic ideal female form” (2009: 48)), has made child

bearing more difficult because narrow hips are passed down from mother to daughter (e.g., Haig 2003).<sup>108</sup> As Shilling writes:

The current state of embodiment derives from evolutionary processes which incorporates *social* as well as biological factors. The organic body changes historically, and over the course of an individual's life, because of its biological and social constitution. (Shilling 1993: 104)

The students enter the yoga practice thinking it might be beneficial, and they build more self-esteem as they get deeper into the practice and learn to recognize their own reactions to it. As they come to embody the norms of body (and mind) management of yoga, and enact the yoga body in ways *they themselves* recognize as in tune with *their own ideas* of the philosophy and how yoga should be, they get closer to unfolding *yoga* into their daily lives. From being something that broke their “habitual behavioural patterns” and induced new experience, and thus altered their way of being-in-the-world, the Ashtanga practice – and not only the *asana* practice – can become *the* habitual pattern. The values, goals, and cosmology of the practice can come to be taken-for-granted, or lived reality. Yoga becomes the world in which the students live, think, and exists. Changes still happen though, but these are changes and adjustments “within” the practice, which has been unfolded to envelope larger proportions of life as relevant. The changes can still be radical, and are interpreted as a part of the practice. Such “changes” can, as I have shown, for instance be injuries – that can reduce the value of or just put in a different perspective the *physical* practice as well as adjust the way it is done – or being authorised to teach.<sup>109</sup> This state can be interpreted as an embodied state, or state of enduring dispositions of body and mind (Shilling 1993). Embodying the right values and posture – or having the right bearing – can also amount to physical capital in Bourdieu's sense (1978), or perhaps “physiological” or “organic” capital as an aspect of the physical capital, as it ties into

---

<sup>108</sup> Such beauty ideals change with current fashions (Cochrane 2009), and today it is said that curves are more beautiful/fashionable than being thin/slim. The ideal of narrow hips, it has been claimed (perhaps a bit prejudiced), stems from the fashion industry, where homosexual designers have used women with boy-like figures. (For an argument on the gay scene's influence on feminine fashion and beauty ideals, see e.g., Ancis 2006; Jeffreys 2000. See Schick, et. al. 2010; Singh & Young 1995 on beauty and narrow hips.)

<sup>109</sup> Changes and new experiences can of course also cast doubt on the practice and the method of Ashtanga as was the case with George, and can be seen in the many negative views of egotism and narcissism in Ashtanga – although this last point is mostly more linked to the weakness of man rather than directly to the practice as such.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

the organic processes of health and normal functioning of the body, within the yoga community.

The student’s own views of yoga and the Ashtanga practice are negotiated and adjusted in soma-signification (Bohm 1995) processes where the meaning of physical experience is sought in reflection, which again is somatised. As I have shown, the significance of experience is not only unfolded out of and into individual bodies, but also into and out of the relationship with the yoga community. As such the individual have an impact on the yoga as a social practice, but the individual person also makes sense of his or her personal practice based on feedback from teachers, fellow students and books, and thus the students themselves and their bodies are changed as well. This is how “... social practices do not simply negate the body but *transcend* and transform it. They change the meaning and character of people’s bodies by actually altering them physically” (Shilling 1993: 107).

As the students’ standing within the community increases, for instance by increased *physiological capital*, their experience and understanding of the practice can to a larger degree have an influence on yoga as understood and practice by other students. Being recognised as embodying central values, and thus as advanced and experienced practitioners, these students can influence and gain authority in the community in general.

Yoga changes the students and alters their bodies, and if their bodies appropriate the socially recognised and valued characteristics they gain capital. The students (in various degrees) also influence the practice, though, and thus change Ashtanga yoga as a practice. Some people – such as Sharath, Saraswathi, other established teachers and advanced students – have more authority in defining what is socially – and physically – relevant within the context of the Ashtanga yoga practice. They can to a much larger degree legitimately change the practice, and as Shilling (1993) puts it:

These groups of what could loosely be termed ‘body experts’ are all involved in educating bodies and labelling as legitimate or deviant particular ways of managing and experiencing our bodies. This affects the recognition we have of our own body practices, and the body practice of others, as ‘right’ and proper or in need of control and correction.



Definitions of the legitimate body and legitimate bodily activities are to be found across many social fields. (Shilling 1993: 145)

This is relevant not only *within* the Ashtanga community, but also across the yoga community as a whole, as divergent practices to some degree are ranked, and even into wider society, as some yoga students by their physical appearance can be identified as someone who knows how to take control and care of body and soul in today's chaotic, post-modern, world.<sup>110</sup> Those who are not able to appropriate an adequate Ashtanga yoga body, or who later come to realize that the practice is not the optimal practice, might decide to leave – or be forced to leave the practice – in favour of another style of yoga, or just quit practicing. Such “drop-outs” or “deviant practices” are partial in reinforcing the boundaries between different yoga styles and physical practices in general. As such the negotiations between different practices takes place within each individual practicing body. George's journey through the yoga world is interesting in these regards, as will be shown in the next part of the chapter dealing with different bodies in dissimilar yoga styles. George's story shows that if the conveyed images are too far from one's own experience of the practice, this might result in withdrawal from the practice. George's experience with Ashtanga was that he got stiffer, injured himself and that the atmosphere in the Shala was counter to his expectations of yoga. Thus, he stopped practicing, and he did not get back into yoga until he found a teacher who had a very different way of teaching. It is also worth noting here that George's main problem was with the *way* yoga was taught and the effects of *Ashtanga* yoga, and not yoga as such.

### 5.1 Different practices, different bodies?

As noted earlier, “yoga” does not connote one single practice. Even the Western way of using the term, meaning mainly *asana* practice, embraces several approaches to the postures. I will compare three different styles and how these practices create different bodies. This way I hope to better show how bodies are created in practice. The first example is Ashtanga yoga in the tradition of Pattabhi Jois as practiced at KPJAYI. The second yoga system I will look at is Iyengar Yoga. Pattabhi Jois and B. K. S. Iyengar, both practiced under Krishnamacharya, and though having a common

---

<sup>110</sup> I will return to a more in-depth focus on such matters in chapter 7.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

teacher, their ways of approaching and teaching yoga are very different. This is usually traced back to their respective health at the time they started practicing with their teacher and his subsequent approach to their respective needs.<sup>111</sup> The third system is the yoga practiced at Bheemashakti Yoga, which is also denoted ashtanga yoga, but offers another way of practicing. The head teacher at Bheemashakti, Suresh, taught with B.N.S. Iyengar, who is teaching at Krishnamacharya’s old school in Mysore. Since these three methods of yoga, all can be traced through Krishnamacharya I find the examples illustrative. The comparison shows how individual practitioners can have massive influence on yoga as practice by incorporating their own experience and interpretations in their teachings, and subsequently establishing different schools of yoga. That both the first and last style is denoted “ashtanga”, just imply that they trace their lineage back to the great sage Patañjali, and his eight-limbed path to *samadhi*. Iyengar (1994) also refers to Patañjali. I will look into how the practices are taught and what kind of bodies they create.

In this part I will use Jennifer and George who both have studied different kinds of yoga. George has studied Ashtanga at KPJAYI and is currently studying and teaching at Bheemashakti. He has previously studied both Iyengar Yoga and Hatha yoga. Jennifer has studied Iyengar yoga for many years and is currently practicing at KPJAYI. They both are explicitly comparing their practices to previous experiences, and though they to some degree are critical in their descriptions, their experiences of different practices are still – or perhaps because of this – illustrative. Jennifer, as a relative novice in Ashtanga circles, is rather preoccupied with how it differs from Iyengar yoga:

Ashtanga relative to Iyengar, I think that people who are injured or ill, would sooner do Iyengar. The healthier and younger starting with Ashtanga. Which makes sense, because Iyengar was ill, he had something like 7 life-threatening diseases and was sent away to Krishnamacharya, his cousin or uncle I think, for the yoga to heal him. And that makes me think even more about, how when I’m in Iyengar circles I don’t hear anyone being sick. So

---

<sup>111</sup> What seems to be amiss here is that they were taught on an individual basis, and that both Iyengar and Jois might be teaching their part of Krishnamacharya’s teachings. Deshikachar – Krishnamacharya’s son and another of his students – seems to be teaching on a more individual basis, which according to various sources is more in line with his father’s teachings. For an introduction to Deshikachar’s method see his “The Heart of Yoga” (1995).

maybe it's people starting out ill or injured and now not versus people starting out young and healthy... And sometimes I'm just in a group of people, and I hear them all talking about their injuries and their pain, and it's like; "and I'm doing this of my own free will with the knowledge that this is how everyone around me sound?" I mean, what is that? Is that like, human unworthiness; is that like seeking one's own pain and demise? I don't know.

Although having been trained by the same teacher, Pattabhi Jois and B.K.S. Iyengar developed very different approaches to yoga and towards the body. Where Pattabhi Jois made flow and the dynamic practice of a set sequence, or sequences of postures, the primary part of the practice, B.K.S. Iyengar's yoga is heavily focused on alignment and correct posture. In Ashtanga yoga, as taught by Pattabhi Jois, the teachers traditionally offer little guidance in how to do the postures correctly, and instead the students should *feel* their way through the *asanas* and series. Jennifer continues:

Ashtanga to me is more like *Kundalini*, in the sense that they're both just "do it!" Just work with your energy body! Just do it! Not a breakdown of how to do it. So that's a big difference for me. A major difference is that with Ashtanga you are doing the exact same sequence all the time, with Iyengar there's great variety, and I love that because Iyengar has constructed sequences for every problem anyone could ever have. Like from arthritis of the wrist to anorexia to depression to low immune system to pms, whatever. To like tension headache. And so if you are having some trouble you can look and do that sequence. Whereas [Ashtanga] is like, always the exact same, very vigorous demanding practice, and if you're having a cold or some problem, it can be hard to find the strength to push through it. So I think the big differences are detail and focus on alignment and how you're doing it versus "just do it." It's like throwing the baby in the swimming pool and it learns how to swim versus swimming classes. And I think that probably Pattabhi Jois and Iyengar are just very distinct humans and that they've influenced how they perceive the teachings and what they bring to things.

As Jennifer puts it, these are very different ways of practicing yoga. In one way what is created is a general awareness of how the body feels and an inward gaze. This awareness is also important in Iyengar yoga, but here the teacher continually gives minute instructions as to how to position oneself. In order to follow the guidance there is less space and time for introspection. In Iyengar the body is somehow fragmented into heels, shoulders, bones and what is important is the relation between these parts. The body is broken down and then put together in a structured way. In Ashtanga there is breath and movement, together with the *bandhas* and the *dristi*. The Ashtanga body might be said to be somewhat simpler. All Ashtanga bodies are made to be the same,

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

while in Iyengar there are different series for all kinds of different ailments. It can be argued that as distinct human beings, Pattabhi Jois and Iyengar – like all other yoga students and teachers – have embodied their practices differently, and they also bring their personalities into their teachings, and further the different schools are attracting, repelling and keeping differently oriented people.

Ashtanga is (stereotypically) spoken of as a powerful and dynamic form of yoga, for the young and healthy. The main focus in teaching is on the *asana* practice, and there is not much teaching on the other parts of the yoga philosophy. Ashtanga creates lean and muscular bodies. There is little teaching one-on-one and few adjustments – perhaps favouring individualist of some ilk – and thus there is a risk for creating an overtly narrow self-focus. Ashtanga is repetitive, and the same sequence is done every day. You just start your practice and go on until you are told to finish, at which point you do the finishing sequence. When the teacher is satisfied with the execution of the last posture a new one is added. As everybody does the same sequence and new *asanas* are added as the level of mastery increases, it is easy to compare yourself with others practicing in the same room. This adds to the risk of narcissism and too much focus on body and the mastering thereof. In such a competitive environment restraint might be hard and even some Ashtanga practitioners say that they are more prone to injuries than other yoga students.

Compared to Ashtanga, the stereotypical image of Iyengar yoga is that it is most suitable for the old and ailing. According to Jennifer, there are fewer injuries among its practitioners, since they rather come to Iyengar for a cure for different bodily and mental troubles. This form of yoga is slower than Ashtanga, keeping you in the postures for a much longer time. It is individually oriented in a different way and focused on right alignment rather than flow and “speed”, often using props to better the alignment in the posture. As Jennifer says, the yoga forms have clear, but very different, guidelines to how the practice should be performed and these are foundational in enacting and creating different bodies.

At Bheemashakti a third kind of yoga body is made, as it is manipulated and created in a way diverging from both Ashtanga and Iyengar. The body and the postures are secondary to *pranayama* (breathing techniques) and meditation. The *asana* practice is

undertaken to master body in order to be able to sit (i.e., meditate), and to be able to do the *asanas* correctly the students first undergo rigorous training. There is individually tailored practice twice daily to prepare the body for the Ashtanga sequences. The practice is as such not repetitive in the same fashion as Ashtanga, and there are fewer students so much attention is given to each of them. At the outset you will be watched practicing, and from there it will decide what exercise you need. Of the Ashtanga practice, George says:

My body didn't react well to the [Ashtanga] yoga practice. Parts of my body got tighter, my backbend got tighter, my hamstrings got tighter, my knee got more pain. And I couldn't find anybody to consult with regarding how I was feeling. And I respect Sharath as a teacher, as an Ashtanga teacher in the way that they teach it, but it just didn't work for me and my body.

George's statement shows the dialog and negotiations between the teacher, the student and their bodies. In his case the Ashtanga body does not come into being, as the manipulation of the body does not work the way it is intended. The enactment fails somehow as he gets stiffer instead of more flexible and experiences more pain. After a long intermission he gets back to yoga, but this time he practiced elsewhere:

I had a positive experience [practicing Iyengar yoga]. I felt like it reacted to my body better, that it was more healthy for my body, and more beneficial. That was my experience in Rishikesh. So then I started travelling south and I actually came back here [to Mysore], and studied with different teachers. I studied Ashtanga but with different teachers. I studied with Ajay. He modifies things, so people can do things. He gives alternatives so he doesn't push people. I practiced with him, and I enjoyed it because I didn't hurt myself. But still the practice didn't really benefit me on a big level. Because I had a very tight body. Very tight hips. Weak core. That combination. And big upper body. That combination really didn't work with Ashtanga. And I practiced Hatha yoga with Venkatesh. It was a back bending class. I think it was two weeks, and I really enjoyed that. I felt like I got some benefits. Still no big breakthrough, but I felt like it was more positive for my body. And then I ran into my current teacher, Suresh. I started practicing meditation and breathing techniques with him. It was chakra meditation and some dynamic breathing techniques, and I don't know why, it just felt good. My mind felt easier. He explained to me later that when you do these breathing techniques, it kind of shapes your consciousness. It shakes it up. It's like rolling dice. You shake it up, and roll the dice and see what comes. It just shook it up a little bit, and stimulated things for me, I felt. And I really enjoyed it. I was sitting for a long time in meditation, so I talked to him about my tight hips. I said: "I can't even do half lotus." I was told by teachers I

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

would never be able to do a full lotus. And he saw me sit, and he saw me do a little practices of half lotus and stuff. So he said: “Now for you, George... if you practice correctly, you’ll be able to do full lotus within 21 days.” I didn’t believe it or disbelieve it, I just had nothing better to do, and so I just practiced with him. So we practiced twice a day. And we ate a certain type of diet, I fasted a little bit. And by the 23rd day I was open enough to do full lotus. And it wasn’t really doing the posture that was interesting; it was actually the process of me experiencing the opening of my body in a way that I never experienced before.

So after George had tried and more or less failed enacting several yoga bodies, Suresh – his current teacher – were able to “shake up his consciousness” and lead him onto a path that suited him and his body-shape. It could be claimed that through breaking George’s habitual patterns of thought and body (Jackson: 1983), his teacher made a new practice, and thus a new way of enacting the body, possible. Instead of trying, trying and trying again, at Bheemashakti they do different preparatory exercises so as to be able to do the yoga postures properly on a later stage. George says of the practice:

The *asana* practice is complex, but basically it concentrates more on opening the body, and strengthening the body at the same time. In seven different dimensions. If we compare it to Ashtanga, Ashtanga is like a library of *asanas*, and you just go through this *vinyasa* and do all these different poses, five breaths each. So you do these *asanas* in order to open the body. From my experience at the time, that process didn’t work for me. So we [at Bheemashakti] concentrate more on opening and strengthening the body through exercises and movements, so we can do *asanas*. We’re not using *asanas* to open the body. We’re using exercises and movement, and using *asanas* with movement, to open and strengthen the body. Then we can leave this concept and enter into an Ashtanga practice if we want. We can go direct into first, second, and then possibly the third and fourth series, with this new open and strong body. So this is the concept that I’m experimenting with myself. My body is totally transformed [compared] to where it was at, but it is still not to where I want... [Yet] I have already experienced so much improvement, and so much incredible things.

The dimensions of the body are either strong or weak in each person, and thus are decisive of how the practice should be done. The seven dimensions are spinal twist, standing side split (leg), backbend, forward bend, handstand (strength), forearm stand and shoulder stand.<sup>112</sup> In George’s words people have different bodies, and therefore have to practice differently in order to “balance” the dimensions. At Bheemashakti

---

<sup>112</sup> <http://bheemashakti.org/bheemashakti-yoga-system/the-seven-dimensions/>

they metaphorically make a detour in order to create a body that can come onto the track “ahead”. Saying this, it is important to repeat that the physical exercises and the *asana* practice are done in preparation for another goal – that of *pranayama* and meditation. In the way George talks about the different practices he has encountered, it is apparent that the body is different under the gaze and manipulation of the different teachers, and that the body is different in the various practices and thus is handled in a variety of ways, creating different bodies. Importantly though, George perceives his own body as totally changed since he began studying with Suresh. Not only is he able to sit in full lotus, which other teachers has said that he would never be able to do, but he has also realised that it can be changed further. He has become more flexible, stronger, and gained more self-esteem through the practice. Most incredible though, is that a heart condition he was born with has now disappeared, which is something I will get back to in Chapter 7. That being said, his body has changed in amazing ways, according to himself.

The reality of the body is not *one* in yoga, but multiple (Mol 2002), something that entails different ways of working it. In Bohm’s (1995) vocabulary we can say that different styles of yoga let the student perceive new meaning and make sense of his or her body and practice, in different ways, thus altering the reality of them if the differences resonate with the student’s previous experience.

These are three different realities of the yoga body. The Iyengar, Ashtanga and Bheemashakti body are ontologically different and cannot exist simultaneously. Ideologically they are put together differently, and thus the rules governing their manipulation diverge. These different manipulations, ways of talking about and acting on the body, further ensures the enactment of different bodies. Annemarie Mol (2002) writes about the enactment of atherosclerosis at Hospital Z in the Netherlands, the body multiple, and how objects are made by the practices that surround them. In Mol’s vocabulary these bodies do not “... encompass each other; they are, rather, situated *side by side*” (2002: 149, emphasis in original). As the atherosclerosis of a patient changes and has multiple realities, yoga bodies are enacted differently and changes ontologically as yoga students travel between the mind-sets and practices of different yoga systems. Growing aware of body is part of these transformations as a “diagnostic” tool as knowledge and practice run together to ensure the “correct”

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

enactment. However, sometimes the enactment fails and the yoga practice does not make the body more flexible, stronger or healthier. Instead the body tightens. As the atherosclerosis is not enacted if the patient does not tell fitting stories, or the body does not show the lack of blood pressure in the legs (Mol 2002), George is not able to enact an Ashtanga body, as he perceives it.

Different schools of yoga are (often) all claiming to be the true, or at least best, way towards *samadhi*, thus contesting *the* body which they alone know the truth or reality of. There are also tensions between the realities of yoga bodies, both between different practitioners and perhaps more interestingly “within” the individual practitioner, i.e., between his or her different (yoga) bodies, one body excluding the other. Following Mol (2002) they all are right insofar that every practice enacts its own reality, but they are also “wrong” since the reality of body is multiple. In my view, breaks in habitual patterns, ideas or new experiences (Jackson 1983), can bridge different bodily enactments and set the practitioner on the path of another yoga system as seen in the case of George.

Mol’s (2002) theory of the body multiple and her praxiography is a handy tool for understanding and explaining the manyfoldedness and contested “nature” of yoga bodies. Although writing and talking about the body, often using the same terms, the traditions of yoga are not necessarily (or rather usually not) hundred percent compatible. They explain body differently and prescribe various practices for diverging reasons. The yoga body is one, but also many, and though they cannot coexist or be realized simultaneously there is, one might say, an inherent potential of realizing different bodies within each individual body. The reality of body can be changed. On a pre-objectified formless level all is connected and in each individual meeting between body, practice, teacher, philosophy, etc. *one* yoga body is objectified. One yoga body is made manifest, gains form (Fyhn 2011) and is brought into being – one “kind” of body is enacted at a time, but there is a potential of other realities as well.



### The dangers of mastering the body

... as can be imagined, the practitioners of Hatha-Yoga have sometimes sacrificed their highest spiritual aspirations and settled for lesser, perhaps magical, goals in service of the ego-personality. Magic, like exo-technology, is a way of manipulating the forces of Nature, whereas spirituality is about the transcendence of the manipulative ego-personality.

Narcissism, or body-oriented egocentrism, is as great a danger among hatha-yogins as it is among bodybuilders. (Feuerstein 2001: 30)

The Ashtanga practice is, as I have shown, a space for building self-trust and where physical changes can become marks of the ability to change, develop and grow. The body is an extremely important element in this. George underlines this positive aspect of mastering the body through mastering advanced postures in yoga practice, but at the same time cautions that ego building can lead one astray. The body as such becomes ambivalent in yoga practice. It is what makes the practice possible, but too great an attachment to body can ruin much of the positive effect of the practice. This is something that is recognized by a lot of the students, and is also something that is debated within the yoga community. George says:

Actually my teacher teaches me that if you go deep into *asana* practice, you're building your ego because you're attaching yourself to your body. You're looking forward to doing postures. But if you go into it knowing that you're building your ego, it can be constructive ego building. You can use a positive purpose, but if you're not aware that it's building your ego it can go out of control and just... that ego will control you, instead of you controlling the ego. (...) So I'm using the *asana* practice to build my ego, to constructively raise my confidence level, my self-esteem. Things of that nature. Without it controlling me.

A lot of the people I have talked have seen the negative ego building aspect of the practice. As mentioned, the structured series of *asana* and how one advances in Ashtanga make it easy to rank students in relation to each other. It is recognised, and I have myself experienced, that this easily leads to a competitive mood where getting the next *asana* becomes vital. Getting new *asanas* becomes a sign of progression and a badge of honour. In itself the feeling of mastering the body and getting better at the postures might add to the self-esteem, sometimes to a point where the postures themselves become more important than the "true" goal of the practice. It is sometimes easy to forget that yoga is more than gymnastics and postures. George who

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

during his stay in the Shala became somewhat disillusioned by many of the students practicing there and by the way of teaching, puts it like this:

I’ve been to the Shala. So I have experience... I have my personal experience there. This is Pattabhi Jois’ Shala. The things that I saw was... egos out of control. That’s my observation first of all.

In addition to not being guided in a way that resounded with his body, George was put off by the ego-driven behaviour he witnessed in the Shala. This illustrates another paradox in the Ashtanga practice.

There is, as I have shown, concern that *asana* practice and mastering advanced postures is a side-track to the goal of liberating the soul and transcending ego. Especially if practiced in isolation and alone, Roger perceives a danger that the practice will build ego rather than vanquish it. In Mysore he sees how all these outsized ego clash. The pushing and showing that takes place before the led classes on Friday and Sunday is by most seen as rather “unyogic.” Some people would wait for one hour from 0330 in the morning to be the first in line. This race for the spots in front on the stage, and in the Shala in general since late-comers would be stuck in the hallway or the changing room, took place in the peak season when Sharath was teaching. Instead of letting go and transcending the ego, the ego is strengthened and the attachment to the body can grow. Some, like Cherry, are even opposed to talking too much about the practice, and I was told, on more than one occasion, that I should not be so “attached to my practice”. This line was frequently delivered outside the Shala at the end of a practice when conversations are often started with, “How was your practice?” The answers deal with the ups and downs, the setbacks and the small triumphs of the practice: “Did you bind?”, “She held us for such a long time in *uthpluthi!*”, “I had to come down from head stand”. It is interesting that, according to Feuerstein (2001), even in the “old days” yogis were warned against getting attached to the magic abilities that *asana* practice could give you, as this would lead them away from attaining liberation. That the term “yoga” today is often associated solely with *asana* practice, is a part of this “problem” and it makes it easy to forget the wider, more “precise”, connotations of the word.

So, on one hand the *asana* practice can help you build self-esteem and give a feeling of mastering your body, on the flip-side the ego can grow too much, and you can lose sight of what yoga is “really” about, namely detachment from ego and the union with Spirit, or between body and mind. Forgetting the rest of the limbs while twisting the body into more and more advanced postures is easy as the body and its obstacles are a lot more tangible than many of the other notions of the yoga philosophy.

George claims that this challenge is more pronounced for Westerners since the attachment to the body is much stronger in the West:

It's because Westerners are attached to their body. And that's the only reason. Indians here who practice yoga, they do less *asanas*, they actually do more of *pranayama* and meditation. And that's just casually they do that. We casually do yoga, we casually do the *asana* aspect. We are attached to our bodies more. So we go through that. Suresh [his teacher] has a prediction, he says in about twenty years, people are gonna have tried the physical aspects of yoga, and get frustrated with it, saying; “we're doing all this yoga, we are achieving all these *asanas* and abilities, but nothing's happening to us. We're not changing, we are not transforming. We're transforming physically, but we are not transforming inside.” So people are gonna have to go to the *pranayama* and meditation, he says. In twenty years, people are gonna get too frustrated with *asanas*, and say; “this is not worth my time.” That's his prediction.

So in Suresh's view, we Westerners are attracted to *asanas* because we are attached to our bodies, but this will not take us where we want to go, and instead we might develop our egos. In saying this, Suresh is claiming we *are* looking for something, and that the way we are practicing will not change and transform us in the way we want. We do *asanas* because we want to transform and change, but it will not happen to the wanted degree. In the end, this will frustrate us, and thus, we will end up doing more *pranayama* and meditation.

The body is not just experienced, it is also seen. I have touched upon the body as capital, and I now turn to the aesthetic body. This will serve as a bridge to the wider aspects of the practice, which will be the topic of the following chapter.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## 5.2 Aesthetification and the body in social settings

... the naturalization of an idealized, aestheticized body (...) – the so-called “body beautiful” – which include highly questionable norms. (Nevrin 2008: 135)

Objects are made by the practices that surround them (Mol 2002). I have thus far focused on different yoga practices and how they entail the enactment of different bodies. The body is also “objectified” through the practice, and is an object others see. Another way of denoting this is by “aesthetification” or the act of making something aesthetically important. The body as an aesthetic object in yoga is created by the way it is talked about and the gaze by which it is appraised, and I have touched upon how body can become an asset in the community of yoga practitioners. The aesthetification is also a way of unfolding significance in the yoga body, though this way of making it meaningful is slightly ambiguous and suspect, as hinted by Nevrin (2008) in the above quote. The manifestation of the body as aestheticized in yoga is imminently social. In looking more closely at this aspect of the yoga body, we are approximating the topic of the next chapter, which are negotiations of what it takes to be a proper yogi and further focus on yoga as an agent of change, which is very central in the unfolding of the personal practice. One way the body is aestheticized is in the notion of a “beautiful practice”. This is perhaps the only legitimate way of complementing another person’s practice. As the practice is a private undertaking, you cannot really tell someone that they are good at what they are doing – unless it is teaching which might be ok to compliment – and it is not proper to tell someone they have a beautiful body. “A beautiful practice” is comprised of several things, and although a somewhat loose term, I would think that all these parts to some degree have to be present. First there is alignment, and the lines of each posture. Alignment has to do with the relationship between the limbs and how they are placed in relation to each other. Lines might be said to be more a question of how the posture looks, but this is of course closely tied to the position of the limbs. Secondly, “a beautiful practice” enfolds how the postures are connected to each other. In Ashtanga yoga, flow, or *vinyasa*, is a central element. *Vinyasa* is made up movement and breath, each breath being connected to one movement. You do not just change between the postures; they are tied together by a set of movements, leading from one posture to the next throughout the series. Thus, there is a third part, breath. The breathing

throughout the practice should be steady and clear. Unsteady breathing indicates that you are doing something wrong, for instance, pushing yourself too hard to hold the posture. Another point, closely tied to breathing, is one's gaze or focus. The gaze, or *dristi*, should be steady, and for every posture there is a set *dristi*. A wavering gaze is an implication of a wavering mind. All of these elements are parts of establishing a beautiful practice, but it is alignment and flow that are most easily observable. The different charters for how the alignments are to be can be found in the literature on yoga, from pictures and videos of accomplished practitioners, and from the instructions given by teachers<sup>113</sup>, as well as from observing advanced practitioners<sup>114</sup> on the mat.

A beautiful practice, in which the aesthetic body is a part, is one of the standards that the practice is judged by and practitioners strive for. In the beautiful practice, which does not necessarily imply an advanced practice, the yoga body is enacted at its fullest. This is another enactment of yoga body, and one that is closely tied to the “functionality” and “performance” which was more in focus in writing about the different bodies enacted through different yoga practices. What is considered a beautiful and graceful practice will vary from branch to branch in the yoga tree, though.

Although the body is a tool for transcendence in yoga, it becomes an object of beauty and admiration. The way the body looks in the practice becomes a way of evaluating practices. The body becomes an object for “measuring” by the way it looks, not necessarily whether the body in itself is beautiful, but how it moves in and takes to the practice. I do not think I have ever heard anyone say to another that they have a good practice, or that they are good at what they do, nor that they have a beautiful body. If someone asks another how their practice was that day, or how it is in general (“How's your practice?”<sup>115</sup>), that person might of course answer, “Good”, but I have usually taken that to mean that it feels/felt good. The body becomes an object of beauty

---

<sup>113</sup> As mentioned, compared to Iyengar yoga, alignment is often/usually considered secondary to flow in Ashtanga yoga. In Mysore, Saraswathi and Sharath would seldom adjust students so as to be closer to the ideal alignment in a posture. Correct alignment in yoga is of importance not to “look good” as such, but to avoid injuries.

<sup>114</sup> “Advanced” is an adjective that can be used both for practices and practitioners, but is seldom (if ever) used to complement someone, but rather in talking *about* someone.

<sup>115</sup> Perhaps the most commonly heard question in Mysore and yoga circles in general.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

through how it “behaves” in the practice and through how it functions. The way the body looks in the practice is also objectivised through books and magazines that tell us how the postures “should” be done, both directly and indirectly, through the authors’ or the depicted practitioners’ status in the yoga community. The yoga body is aestheticized through these media, as well as through posters and such things. The students consult these pictures to get an idea of how the postures are to be performed and which postures are next in line in the sequence. Some books on Ashtanga, by selected authors, advanced students or teachers have a higher standing than others.

The “beautiful practice” is, as such, a graceful practice, and as Gregory Bateson (2000e) writes in his article on style and grace in primitive art, grace has meaning and thus, points to something apart from itself. Grace in art is metaphorical, and, although not necessarily consciously, it tells us something about that which it is compared to. For art it, according to Bateson (2000e) tries to remedy and fix societal things that are out of synchronicity. As for the beautiful – or graceful – Ashtanga yoga practice, which is a skill or an art form the executioner of the graceful practice exhibits in linking breath, movement and alignment in a chain of postures, this practice tells the onlooker (especially those who are skilled or “enlightened”, but importantly also “beginners” will often recognize the beauty of movement) something about the practitioner. The skilled performance tells something about the performer. In yoga circles in can indicate that those capable of beautiful practices – irrespectively of how advanced they are posture-wise – are in touch with themselves, with their bodies, with their breath, and in short with (central notions of) yoga. They are in harmony with their practice, the postures, and their bodies. The beautiful practice also says something about yoga. It says that practicing yoga can lead to such grace and connection. And as with works of art, looking at and delving into such a practice as a spectator can amount to an experience, in Dewey’s (2005) meaning of the term, and can thus also have influence on his or her own practice. Becoming able to recognize a beautiful practice is thus part of unfolding a personal yoga practice.

“Body”, in practice and the on mat (and ideally also in yoga in general) focus on “functionality” of body, what it can do and how, but in the beautiful practice and outside the practice, the body (how it looks) is layered with meaning – and this meaning is not necessarily controllable by the practitioner. “It [the body] is a pure and

universal utility, which is thereby layered with a wealth of meanings as soon as training gives way to other social institutions” (Sassatelli 1999: 241). This, apart from Bateson’s (2000e) ideas of grace, also connects the yoga body to Bourdieu’s notions of physical capital (1978; see also Shilling 1993). The physically visible results of the practice has significance as seen in the statements of Jennifer and Andreas, and these layers of meaning (for instance creating attractive bodies) outside the practice as a whole (not only on mat), proves the (physically transformative) power of yoga for some of the practitioners, as well as some other (“informed”) observers. As Jennifer says: Ashtanga bodies are closer to what is conventionally considered as attractive bodies than bodies created in for instance Iyengar yoga. The fit yoga body thus becomes a billboard for the practice and can make the Ashtanga practice attractive for other people (who may or may not be able to penetrate below the physical aspects, as Paula says of those who are merely sculpting the body). Though becoming fit is an (un-) fortunate by-product of yoga practice, the yoga body can be partial in strengthening the idea of the “normality” of a certain type of body (Sassatelli 2006; Thompson and Hirschman 1995).

According to Bourdieu (1978), the body is central as symbol of something more, and he writes:

Insofar as the ‘body-of-others’ is the visible manifestation of the person, of the ‘idea it wants to give of itself’, its ‘character’, i.e. its values and capacities, the sports practices which have the aim of shaping the body are realizations, among others, of an aesthetic and an ethic in the practical state. (Bourdieu 1978: 834)

There is something to this, but it also seems a bit too instrumental in regards to yoga (and others physical activities). Yes, the body might become a symbol of a holistic view of life, the universe and everything, or of an advanced practice or harmonious being – in short: to all that is good with yoga. These “ambitions” are for some important gates into the practice. But in yoga practice, the body is also ambiguous and suspicious since it “should be” secondary to the practice as a whole. As many yoga practitioners would claim: Yoga’s transcendental ambitions ought to be the driving force. Ashtanga yoga is enacted and manifests in the practice, and the practice is formed by the intentions and expectations we bring into it.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

In this chapter, I have tried to show how yoga practices unfold and manifest in the meeting between body and a physical experience of *asana*, and further how yoga unfolds both inwards and outwards as it gains more and more significance for the practitioners. The reality of yoga in the practitioners lives become subtler and more complex, as their practices gain *importance* and become relevant in ever wider circles of their existence. Their worlds become enfolded in their yoga practices. The practice and their realities enfold and are unfolded from each other in a Klein bottle like fashion. Layers of meaning are added both in their bodies and in their environments as ever-subtler realities emerge. All these processes feed back into their bodies and their experience thereof, changing their bodies and thus altering their identities and themselves. They enact and create bodies, and they *become* yoga practitioners.

The body as layered with unfolding significance, and ideas of normality points us outwards to the next chapters, where I first will look into the wider aspects of yoga practice as an agent of change and particularly the two first limbs of Ashtanga, i.e., the *yamas* and *niyamas*, as an entry to the debates on what it takes to be a yogi. In Chapter 7, I will deal with ideas of the body and health and how they relate to practicing yoga in our modern-day world.



## 6: Yoga as an agent of change and the requirements of a yogi

‘Structures’ are not social facts in the Durkheimian sense, but sets of ‘rules’ and ‘resources’ which actors draw on, and hence reproduce, in social actions.

In one sense, Giddens’s comments on the body complement his view of the structure/agency relationship. Human bodies are themselves the medium and outcome of human (reproductive) labour. Furthermore, as well as constraining human action, bodies provide us with the means to intervene in, and alter the flow of daily life. (Shilling 1993: 201)

... it is important to understand that the realm of human experience the derives from the union of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* – first the principles of intellect, individuation, and mind and subsequently sensory experience, emotions, and instincts, among all other things that make up the whole heap – is inherently *klišṭa*, that is, painful, full of suffering, and illusory to the extent that it is bounded by a *samsaric* cycle of life and death rather than by the unbounded nature of the incombant, primordial, immutable universe. (Alter 1999: S47)

In the preceding chapter, the body and the physical practice were the point of departure in looking at changes that the yoga practice might entail. The focus in this chapter will be on changes and transformations that spring from these physical changes and changes in habitual patterns of behaviour. That is, the relations between personal experience and what can be termed lifestyle changes. Many of these changes can be linked to attitudes that are fostered within the practice. As such, I, in this chapter, will unfold further the topics of the previous, and look at how the practice unfolds into and gets feedback from the surroundings. I also delve into the norms, rules and precepts of the practice apart from the *asanas*. In other words I will look into how the “structures” – the rules and resources – of the Ashtanga yoga practice are repertoires the students both draw on and are reproducing and changing through their negotiations and their physical and social involvement with yoga. Yoga, and, within it, Ashtanga yoga depending on which delimitation we stress, can as such be seen as social fields (Grønhaug 1974; Shilling 1993). This focus also implies looking at yoga practitioners’ claims of what it takes to be a proper “yogi.” The debates and “negotiations” around the proper way of practicing yoga *in life* have impact on personal experience of the practice, and thus on what changes are deemed desirable with the Ashtanga yoga context. This will be the third part of this chapter, and it says

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

something of how the students themselves delineate both yoga as an ideal and their own practice.

As a social field, Ashtanga yoga can be interpreted as a lifestyle, which

... refers to a relatively integrated set of practices chosen by an individual in order to give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity. The more tradition loses its ability to provide people with a secure and stable sense of self, the more individuals have to negotiate lifestyle choices, and attach importance to these choices... (Shilling 1993: 181)

As any lifestyle usually includes adopting prescribed body regimes, they affect the body as well as the mind (Shilling 1993). All lifestyles effect the body/mind nexus, as, whether there is a particular body regime or not, a lifestyle embraces self-presentation, a particular style (Hebdige 1999), and being in the world. In the simplest way this is influenced by what is eaten and what is worn, but also by how one moves about in the world, which would again affect the way the world is lived and experienced. As Mauss (1973) asserted in his famous treatise on the techniques of the body, even basic acts like walking and swimming are socially and culturally influenced. In the yoga lifestyle, and for being a *yogi*, according to Sharath, it is vital to practice all aspects of yoga, especially the *yamas* and the *niyamas*, and not only *asana*. Thus I will attempt to show the relationship between personal physical practices and the social context in which these take place, that is, how the embodied physical practice of *asanas* takes place in the social context of the yoga community. From Chapter 7, I will turn to the (Ashtanga) yoga community's relationships with the wider (global) community, and try to discern both how Ashtanga is affected by modern society and how Ashtanga has an impact on its surroundings. This will entail including a more critical, or outsider, view of the global community of Ashtanga yogis. These more critical actors voice their thoughts on authenticity, changes of the tradition, as well as certain economic issues in Ashtanga. As such, it will occasion a double perspective with outside (and insider) criticism. What yoga is and how it should be practiced is negotiated in this nexus of social friction (Tsing 2005).

## 6.1 Change

I can't say what yoga has done, I can say the changes that have occurred since practicing, and whether it was other things in my life or yoga, I don't know. But... God, this is gonna sound like the biggest sales pitch ever, like I have far more loving and peaceful relationships with my parents, I like myself a lot better and I'm much more comfortable with who I am. I don't think I had a sense of who I was to even like it or not like it. Believing part of that is just aging. I'm a much clearer communicator, but I think that's because of the specific teacher I had, and like various modalities that she was into, but maybe also from teaching yoga you have to be so clear. I think I've met a lot of interesting people, I don't think I would have spent two years living in Hawaii if I hadn't done yoga, and that affected my life just as much as I think yoga did. (Jennifer)

When yoga practitioners are talking about yoga as an instigator of change, it is important to keep in mind that change might occur on several levels. On the level of physical or bodily change, the changes range from getting more fit, stronger and more flexible, to a better posture and change of gait, via improvements of back or hip problems to the healing of severe trauma. There are also the stories of disappearing heart arrhythmias and asthmas. Yoga for others has been a way of battling addiction to alcohol or drugs. Related to these changes are also changes in notions of spiritual dispositions, mind-sets and general outlook. Such changes might entail changes in general attitude towards life, fellow human beings and oneself. For different reasons many practitioners become vegetarians or vegans – be it because the body feels better or because some idea of environmental or spiritual responsibility. Habits change. Appearances might change, and some start dressing differently – perhaps to blend in with the yoga crowd or because of environmental considerations and thus wearing only organic fabrics for instance.

*Meeting him in 2011, Stefan's life has changed a lot since I met him the first time two years prior. "The yoga takes over more and more," he says. Back then he said that yoga was mostly a break from work, and a way to just relax and rewind. Working too much back home, coming to Mysore for the second time to practice was mainly rebooting and stressing down, and he didn't necessarily practice that much at home. He now dreams of opening a Mysore-program with his girlfriend, Mary, in his hometown. I think she is at least partly why yoga takes more of his time. They met in*

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

*Mysore and, I assume, being two dedicated practitioners makes it easier to delve further into the practice. His music, though still important, isn't vital anymore. If his band gets a record deal it would be nice, but it doesn't matter that much. His life circles Yoga these days, and is what he really wants to do. He also wants to come to Mysore for an extended period of time, and stay perhaps six months or even longer. The dedication he has established since 2009 has brought him back twice – making the 2011 trip his fifth – and this time around he was rewarded for his dedication with getting authorized. Mary got her authorization just a few weeks prior.*

The yoga community in Mysore can be interpreted as a contested social field, where not only wizened yogis, but also other students, try to wield their influence over the students' bodies and minds, and the values of certain practices are ambivalent. Grønhaug (1974, part 2) defines a social field as a delineated system of implications of, or intended and unintended consequences and reactions to, actions. Fields are “... systems of interrelated events...” (Grønhaug 1974, part 2: 16), and are descriptive and analytical divisions. People can move across several such fields. According to Shilling

... a social field refers to a set of *dynamic organizing principles*, ultimately maintained by social groups, which identify and structure particular categories of social practices (be they concerned with art, economics, eating, fashion, sport, sexuality, education etc.). Each field has a relative autonomy from other fields, and bestows values on social practices according to its internal organization. (Shilling 1993: 139)

Shilling (1993) further asserts that bodies – as unfinished entities – and social contexts are interdependent, and thus, are constantly changing and in a state of flux. This implies that as the yoga students are coming from various backgrounds for divergent reasons, the students are influenced by yoga philosophy and the practice in several and different ways, and when entering the field of yoga in Mysore, the internal organisation of the yoga community exert influence on them. Additionally, they are bringing divergent baggage *into* the practice and the yoga community, which has an impact on the practice and the community – yoga as a social field – as such. As Bohm (1995) asserts, we always act on the totality of our previous experience.

To my mind, this would also mean that the body as an entity can be contested, and it is an arena where competing images of body are being unfolded at different times, as suggested in Chapter 5.2. Different social contexts and associated practices can pull the body in different directions, as when yoga students drink alcohol and smoke marijuana, or when they do different yoga styles because they value physical forms differently. Several contexts have influence on the body at different times, but also simultaneously. The student does not necessarily feel or see the dissonance between the goals of the different contexts, though. As such, they might incorporate several meanings, which can surface at different times. They can also at some intersections, such as being hung over while practicing, experience the competing drives of the body at work. “Competing” here, does not necessarily mean that there are two or more conscious forces with each pulling the body in their own directions. Rather they are competing in not being compatible for evolving the ideal body in any of the practices. Social fields are creating categories of physical capital, when “... specific bodily form, activity or performance...” (Shilling 1993: 139) are bestowed with value (Shilling 1993).

**“There’s so much more to yoga than the physical practice.”**

The first time I met Marianne was over breakfast at Santosha. Being Norwegian we started talking. This was her first trip to Mysore, and when I asked her how she found the whole experience, she was a bit hesitant. It seemed that all was not good. Venturing into the topic of the practice, she first said that very few of the people practicing in Mysore lived up to her visions of what a yoga practitioner should be like. Many of the people she had met over the last few weeks were too shallow, too social and too competitive. To her it seemed that too much had to do with getting new postures and being the best at doing *asanas*. She had trouble being social because of all that happened in the practice. The whole coming to India and practicing in the Shala had been such a personal experience that she just needed much time on her own to make sense of it all. “There is so much more to the practice than just the physical! There is so much happening in there [in the Shala].” That was one of the things she meant with people being too social: “Too few actually take time to really think the whole yoga and Mysore experience through!” When I said that a lot of the people I have interviewed actually seem rather reflected, at least when it comes to their own

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

practice and reasons for coming here, and actually have been thankful for getting the opportunity to reflect upon these things through my questions, Marianne countered that might be one of the problems: They only think of themselves, and not of the deeper implications of the practice. This echoes the sentiments of many others I have talked to, who say that many of the students coming to Mysore seem almost afraid of reflecting upon why they are here and what the practice entails. Therefore they turn to social events and other people to escape the necessity of thinking. This, for Marianne, meant that yoga has paradoxically become a way not of dissolving ego, but of building and strengthening it, which has been shown on several occasions throughout the preceding chapters. To Marianne, on the other hand, the practice and travelling to Mysore had forced her to turn inwards and really reflect upon deeper issues not only of the practice, but also such things as the poverty and extremely large differences in standards of living that exists in India and the world.

Roger has tried to find out what it is that is going on in the Shala and in Mysore. He has talked to a lot of people about it, he says, but he has not reached a clear conclusion. “The whole experience [of Mysore and the practice] changes lives,” he says. And, to him, it is weird, because you really just do your own practice. At least before the more advanced students started assisting Sharath, one hardly ever got any help, comments or adjustments. We just paid the fee and were left to our own devices. Still, a lot happened in the there, and not only by the deepening of the practice. As Roger said: “I’m not sure if it is the energy or what it is, but it is something.”

### **Finding the truth of world and self: The end of suffering**

Well I mean if we did a sampling, let’s say; how many people are in the Shala? 160? I’d say, what? 60%? More. What do you think? Have tattoos. So... I’m trying to think of the older... like Lino [Miele]... all those guys... that whole generation, the big generation of the 70s, I don’t know if any of those guys have tattoos... I don’t recall. David Swenson doesn’t. So I think that whole generation doesn’t, I think it’s partially maybe when Ashtanga yoga was brought to the west, it was considered probably something not mainstream, something a little edgy and maybe that went with the whole tattoo, piercing kind of thing. I joke around, like I feel bad that I haven’t been to rehab, or I’ve no disorders, I need to find some kind of problem to... It’s funny because you speak to a lot of people, and a lot of people have a lot of issues. And I’m like; “you know, my parents never got divorced.” (Cherry)

In writing about transition and transformation, I am trying to catch the movement into yoga in times crises, as Cherry somewhat jokingly points to in the above quote. These crises can be accidents and injuries, loss of job, suffering, being burned out, the experience of existence as futile, or drugs. The transformation through yoga is a journey from suffering to happiness or at least contentment, from externality to internality, from others to self. It is finding the path or finding oneself. In getting to know yoga the students go from half-baked ideas and notions to embodied experience and philosophical explanations. They can go from feeling of goodness and rightness to knowledge of benefits and experience-based reasons. The norms and values of yoga can become somatised and embodied if they to a certain degree are compatible with the intentions and expectations of the yoga student. They are made significant for oneself. And the search is often for the true self, as Paula puts it: “I always keep doing *asana*, I was keeping doing *pranayama*, but for me the search was much more about the self - the true self. And yoga for me was that.”

Though much I have discussed until this point seems to purport that yoga practice fosters self-centred or egotistic human beings, who only get in touch with themselves, there is also another side to these stories, that is; in getting in touch “with themselves” some of these aspiring yogis also realise their connectedness to the world and the universe in general. In learning to listen to their bodies they hear and recognise the resonance of a much larger unity. The students, as well as the yoga philosophy, communicate the importance of this. As stated by Jois: “If one’s mind is impure and overtaken by “I” and “mine,” then one’s true nature of bliss will be spoiled, and one will become miserable.” (Jois 20: 2002)

In recounting how he got caught up in the yoga practice, Martin reflects both upon his own ideas of the practice and how his friends and family met his newfound fascination:

Uhm, there was quite a bit of scorn from people. There was a lot of kind, of born again kind of jokes. My friend Henry, still my best friend Henry, for about a year was referring to me as “the new you”, you know. So he didn’t appreciate... and he wouldn’t join, I mean, he was a... he and I went to gym together, and he wouldn’t try yoga, he thought it was too bound up in

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

mysticism and India and hippiness. And I remember my dad said to me, he’d seen something on TV about yoga, and he said - my dad’s an engineer - and he said; “well, in engineering terms, doing a backbend is like trying to break a door hinge the wrong way. It’s just not designed to do that. You know, that’s what you’re doing to yourself.” And when I injured myself, he was like; “I told you so.” And I’d already begun to distance myself from some of more destructive friends, and this really was the end of that, those relationships. Now it just seemed abhorrent to me that people - unfortunately people I cared about - were pursuing this thing in such a negative, destructive way. And of course it was a bit born again, because I was telling everybody; “this is an amazing thing, you should try it!” I tried that for a while, and of course you get nowhere, so I stopped all that. And I just stopped bothering with people that can’t help themselves, to a certain extent. Not fully, but also, I think I began to have a bit more compassion for people. You know, I wasn’t quitting my friends because I didn’t like them or anything, it was just... I felt that I couldn’t help them, and they couldn’t help me, and I felt a great pity that, you know, if everybody could discover something like this... and it does suit people who have been into extreme things, if only they would take their energies and put it into this. Wouldn’t we all be much better off? You know, I could feel this improvement coming, in so many ways, and I just thought; what a gift for people if people would accept it, but... I don’t know, if that’s... that’s fairly superficial, I can’t really tell you at the moment anything deeper than that.

Martin illustrates the “dilemma” of caring for self or caring for others quite well. People scorns yoga a bit, but that is because they do not understand. Finding yoga he began distancing himself from some of the more destructive elements of his surroundings. It was hard for “the new him” to see people he cared for destroying themselves by living the wrong way with alcohol and drugs. He – in hindsight – was a bit born again. He had found the truth, which made him in some ways superior, and when his surroundings would not listen to his gospel, he stopped bothering about people who wouldn’t help themselves. Later he became more compassionate, and saw that although he wanted to help, he could not. He pitied them for not being able to see all the good things that could come their way if they just stepped onto the path that he was willing to show them. He wants everybody to find something like he found, something that can change their lives like it changed his. And, of course, it can be argued that he has a sense of superiority in this as well. Only those of a superior standing, be it moral, spiritual or intellectual, can pity those of a “lesser” standing. But there is also another level here – Martin himself grew in his understanding of the practice. From being driven to injuring himself and preaching the yoga way, he is now at a more relaxed place in his practice, both in ways of the practice – a road



which we have seen elsewhere in this text has been strewn by injuries – and in the relationship to non-practitioners. Martin’s own practice has become more of a gift that he is just happy to be able to enjoy – it is not so much of a competition anymore. His own ambitions for the practice have changed, and as such, he is now even more in the know. He is among those who have *really* understood what it is all about, i.e., letting go of the ego-driven lust for accomplishment and new *asanas*, and just being and caring for others. He has unfolded and reached another level of understanding.

Finding oneself is often hard work, and the search usually starts with some kind of “crises” that forces one to start looking, Helena for instance went through a rather long process, as she explains when asked:

... there’s a lot of changes, but the main change is that, the base changed. Before - and it was a process, actually the last two years in Chicago, very painful, very painful like literally living on the ground, and not being able to pick myself up. Two years. Because the process was of knowing that all of those desires and all of the ideas for life that I had before, gotta go. It’s not true. Not true. And I had to reinvent everything, so letting go of that took me two years and took me some pain.

For a lot of the people I talked to, their story of yoga is a story of transition and transformation, where yoga either starts them down a road of change or is introduced to them by others as a solution to their troubles. Related to these stories of change and transformation, there are, for instance, stories about battling drug addiction. Cherry told a story about a sixteen year old boy who was saved from addiction by yoga:

I mean, a guy I met last year, when he was sixteen he was in a drug rehab. Sixteen! And for him the yoga was part of his therapy, I think he started maybe with meditation and... But in any case, it led him to the yoga, and the yoga has kept him away from the drugs. And so what’s completely... for him, I mean, he was thirty, so it has completely changed his life. Whereas for me it was like, “oh I’m running, it looks like fun and whatever,” so different things lead people to it, but I think that once you get to a certain point, and you’ve deepened your practice and you’ve dedicated yourself to the practice, I think it... we all come to a similar place eventually.

In this story, yoga is a redeeming practice that is used therapeutically to battle drug addiction, and, as Cherry puts it, is a continuing practice has also prevented a relapse

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

into drugs. From beginning with meditation, and, from there, taking up yoga, the life of this person has changed completely. Cherry’s way into the practice was as a side-practice, taken up to improve her running, and thus, very different, but she still claims that the practice will make somewhat similar paths for all practitioners if there is enough dedication. She is convinced that yoga can change peoples’ lives, and she elucidates her view on the transformative effects of yoga, and not just Ashtanga yoga:

I think that... at least in Canada and North America, you live in a society - and I mean I’ve led the same life, I was working, I was travelling - we isolate ourselves, we stress ourselves out, and I think that - and I used to run and I found running very meditative, I could run for like 3 hours right. If that doesn’t relax you, I don’t know what will. But the yoga was very different from running, and I found that it gave me so much and that I would tell other people that I was working with; “you need to do yoga.” I didn’t say Ashtanga, it’s not like everybody has to do Ashtanga, it’s not like that. So a woman I was working with started an Iyengar practice, she lost weight, she felt better, she slept better, like everything in her life improved. From going to an Iyengar class, she went once a week and she went twice a week. It’s what happens right? I’ve seen what it’s done to me, and to people in my life, and I just feel that a lot of people can benefit from it. The meditative quality... I mean I’ve been vegetarian almost my whole life, but people who I’ve seen them change their diet, like the yoga changes you physically, it makes you not wanna eat certain things, I think it has a positive effect. And I was speaking to my teacher, and I said; “oh, you know, like I’m just teaching a yoga class, like that’s all I’m doing, right.” And he said; “yeah, but you know if that person goes home, and is now in a good mood, like it has a cascade effect, right.” And people, like you bind someone for the first time, and they’re like... they come up to you, and they’re like; “it’s the best day of my life, I just bound!” And it seems like a small thing, but I think it has an overall positive effect. And physically in terms of my practice I think it just showed me, I guess areas where I was strong and areas where I was weak because you need to demonstrate for the students.

To Cherry, there is something inherently good in yoga practice, and from humble beginnings like going to one class a week, change will unfold. She also points to “a cascading effect” that does not just limit these changes to the one actually practicing, but since this person feels better and is happier, his or her surroundings might also benefit and be uplifted.

Yoga is a therapy that goes to the root and changes the base of things, just as Helena says in the quote on page 191. The main change she perceives is that the base has changed, and as a result of that, she has had to reinvent herself. She links the practice

of yoga to compassion and love for other people. Though it is a practice undertaken to improve one's own experience of life, this in turn should enable yoga practitioners to spread goodness to other people as well. Roger adds his voice to these topics:

I think a lot of people here... it's like "oh, yeah I do yoga. I do Ashtanga." and it's just like that's it, that's the end of the story. They don't really care... you know, about anything... For me it's not about doing yoga, it's about... What I'm looking for, you know, the type of experiences that I'm looking for. Transformative experiences, that I've had in the past, and that I... We all have issues, and we all have... things that are... holding us back from being happy essentially. I mean, that is really what we're trying to all, live fulfilled lives.

Roger says here that yoga became such an important part of his life because he saw it as a potentially transformative practice supplying potentially transformative experiences. He sees it as an endeavour to live a fulfilled life.

An important aspect of change, and fulfilling life, is the end of suffering. George expresses this quite simply when trying to explain why he practices yoga, he just says: "I'm just... honestly I'm just... I wanna feel good. I want to not suffer." Suffering is additionally a central image in Hindu, and also Buddhist, philosophy. The *Samsara*, the circle of life, death and rebirth is fraught with suffering. So is the Age of Kahlī Jug, or the Age of Illusion, which is the current time cycle (e.g., Eliade 2009). These are the End of Times, and suffering is one of its main characterizations (ibid.). In "Sedna", his sweeping account on the development of worldviews, Duerr (1987) claims that the Hindu philosophy of *samsara*, suffering, and the annihilation of the self not merely through death, but the escape from the illusion of reality and the *samsaric* circle, grew from an existential crisis. The goal of Hinduism, and similar religious philosophy, is liberation from suffering through detachment gained by realizing that we are clinging to mere illusions. There is nothing real and nothing really matters. In Duerr's (1987) view, these ideologically radical attempts at exculpation – not targeted at some paradise, but in total extinction<sup>116</sup> – are the only way to resolve the dominant tensions and negations in life "... since we left the paleontological tundra of innocence and it seems that we historically failed through intervention, production, development, thinking etc. to return to a state where life as it

---

<sup>116</sup> Although, as Duerr (1987) also points out, this is a self-negation as there "in reality" is nothing to extinguish.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

is to a great extent is characterised by a natural self-evidence” (Duerr 1987: 289). Maybe it is a similar powerlessness and thus, suffering, that we see today, as the “certainties” of yesterday’s society are cast into doubt (e.g., Heelas 2008; Shilling 1993). It could be philosophised that there is an existential resonance between the advent of Hinduism and Buddhism, as sketched by Duerr (1987), and the experience of modern-day yoga practitioners.<sup>117</sup> Also as we as humans are creating our own life-worlds, if we identify life as suffering and plagued with doubt, such a world is what we will enact.

Suffering is a motive in the life stories of many practitioners. Whether these narratives are influenced by the language of suffering in the yoga philosophy and attached to the individual life story in retrospect, or based on experience of suffering that is only “compatible” with this is not all too clear. Some have sought yoga to alleviate suffering, be it physical pain or what might be called more existential suffering. Others find a vocabulary to talk about suffering only after commencing in the practice, or actually learning through yoga philosophy that human existence is characterized by suffering and at this point, frames everything on these terms. What is clear is that the image of suffering can be fundamental, and that the main goal of yoga practice, traditionally, is the end of suffering, as De Michelis (2008) ascertains: “From the beginning, its [i.e., yoga’s] *raison d’être* is the dispelling of the (postulated) malaise of *avidyā*, the foundational “ignorance” or “nescience” intrinsic to the human condition” (De Michelis 2008: 25).

Suffering is central in Helena’s story of her deepening commitment to yoga. This was not physical suffering, but a less tangible, existential suffering that she was struggling to cope with. As she puts it, she was struggling with direction:

For the past two years, I had a big urge... Of course while being in serious practice, meditation and *asana* practice, the urge to come to India always came. Right? So, it’s usually for me it’s like *asana* practice, when I come back after a break... *Asana* practice, and then I go deeper, I wanna sit [meditate] a lot, and then India would come. It will be like the third stage of my practice. “Go to India, go to India!” So for two years I just... I felt the urge, you know, to go,

---

<sup>117</sup> On the other hand, it could be argued that this is a rather romantic view on par with Rousseau’s noble savage, and some yoga practitioners’ ideas of returning to some “original” and “authentic” way of living. This is, as such, parallel to the exposition on “family” and “community” in Chapter 4.

but I was... Now I know that I wasn't ready, back then, yet. You know. For two years. And finally.... finally... you know, my ego just didn't... didn't really wanna let go, you know. (...) For two years, when I said; "No, no, no, I'll do something else, I'll take care of this, I'll take care of that", I was actually, you know, suffering a lot. I was like, nothing worked, none of the things that my mind would... would... come up with ideas for substitution of this urge, nothing worked. And every time, you know, I failed, I would feel more miserable. Because "Oh, my God it's not it, oh my God, that's not it!"

To Helena this is partly a problem of the ego, which is much in line with what is taught in the yoga philosophy. The ego drives people to the wrong things, and the ego struggles to hold on, which causes pain and suffering. As Helena puts it, her ego would not let go, and she was not able to connect to the voice inside of her that said she must go to India. The ego in Helena's phrasing becomes something "external", an entity that controls her, which is a bit like Freud's controlling "super-ego". Her mind would make up excuses to not follow her urges, and she would feel more and more miserable. After two years of frustration, through reading, she finally found the inspiration to follow her intuition and her inner voices, which, according to her, (and other practitioners) are opposed to the ego and the mind. Instead of following the ego, and the ways of the mind, she now follows her heart. However, her ego has still not turned completely away from worldly matters, but it does not want to self-destruct anymore, as she vividly puts it. Now her ego wants to participate "in the worldly events and reality (...) in a very beautiful way (...), in a creation way". She thinks, for instance, that she might have a child one day. She hopes this positive change is permanent and not just a phase.

Yoga is both a way of making suffering meaningful, and a way of alleviating suffering. Suffering is meaningful within the framework of the yoga philosophy, and the philosophy can explain the feeling of meaninglessness, that to some seem to prevail in this time and age. The yoga practice also alleviates suffering by being a "meaningful" activity, and something that can draw a path, from the suffering that was felt yesterday or that is felt today, towards a future where the suffering is no longer. As in Helena's case, the pain she felt during her two years of confusion was lessened when she connected with her intuition and travelled to India. George's suffering is alleviated, and through his continued practice he also sees a future further

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

ahead without suffering. Yoga practice and teaching can be a project to end one’s own suffering, but it also can be foundation from where one can help others.

As human beings, we have a fundamental need to order our experience into functioning wholes, and even things that seem to carry contradictory messages fall under our tremendous capacity for ordering our lived universes.<sup>118</sup> Among yoga practitioners, the goals of their practice are central points of orientation. There are, according to Sarbacker,

... variations in desired outcomes in traditional Indian ascetic practice (tapas). These variations, Sarbacker claims, can generally be categorized as either “cessative” or “numinous” in teleological orientation. The former focuses on liberation from pain and suffering, and the latter on the attainment or realization of divinity. (Singleton & Byrne 2008: 11)

Ashtanga yoga, as other forms of modern (postural) yoga, draws on both “cessative” and “numinous” teleological assumptions (Sarbacker 2008). The “numinous” aspect might be prevalent when yoga is practiced as self-realisation or as a “spirituality of life” (Heelas 2008) practice, though some might question the “divine” component of such projects. The “cessative” aspects are apparent among today’s Ashtanga practitioners. Because of yoga’s, and thus, Ashtanga’s, “cessative” orientations, they provide the practitioners with a vocabulary within which they can make sense of and present their own pains and suffering. Sarbacker (2008) writes:

... practitioners find resonance with the *śramaṇa* [renouncer or “striver”] ethos, given their experience of alienation produced by rapid urbanization and the centrality of “productive” employment that characterizes the capitalist ethos. (Sarbacker 2008: 165)

---

<sup>118</sup> In the article “Skjult mønster” [Hidden pattern] (Olsen 2012a) on conspiracy theories, in the Norwegian paper *Morgenbladet* on March 28<sup>th</sup>, it was claimed that the appeal of conspiracy theories increase in a complex and chaotic world. As humans, we do not like to think that we live in a world governed by chance, and we have a fundamental need for safety and control. A central claim in the article is that the hypothesis of conspiracy is not changed in face of contradictory statements. Rather the conspiracy theory is “enlarged”. Those who try to refute the theory, quickly become a part of the conspiracy (Olsen 2012a). This is not written to neither support nor refute, the claims of so called conspiracies, but rather as an example of human’s need to categories and order their existence. In this case it is applicable both to those who “believe” in the “conspiracies” and those who “need” to label the alternative theories and those who promote them as “conspiracies” and “conspiratorial”. As Murphy (1987) writes: “We look for order because it makes predictability possible, and we seek predictability to avoid danger in an essentially perilous world” (Murphy 1987: 33). We try to “... impose human order upon formlessness” (ibid.).

One of the baselines in the yoga philosophy is that the human condition is characterized by suffering, and that the practice of yoga, in all its forms, is the way to ease this suffering. The vocabulary and ideological framework of yoga thus scopes various problems, whether they are physical aches and pains from the practice, social challenges, existential anxiety or plain disillusionment with the world today. As such, those who suffer can find resonance in the philosophy, and can also find hope that there might be some release. Yoga and its vocabulary then become the way to express, categorise, decipher and thematise, both previous and present experience. This can happen as long as these experiences can be recognised as relevant and consequential within a yoga framework, and resemble how possessions must fit culturally accepted patterns to be deemed true in Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere 1981), and how expressing and eventually trying to heal bodily and mental affliction take different shapes, depending on cultural context (Csordas 2002). Those who are suffering in the yoga community – and are in pain – can find explanations. For instance, they are transforming, their ego is resisting or they are doing some *asana* wrong. Thus, they can, despite the suffering, still find consolation in the practice, and make the injury significant in the context of their physical, spiritual, personal, eschatological and/or professional project, whatever the quest they are on.

Though notions of suffering are common in these students' narratives, there might be a danger in emphasising their travails too much. There is a possibility that these motives have grown in importance parallel to their deepening practice as they are socialised into the terminology of yoga. Other central motivations for practicing yoga can, as touched upon elsewhere in this thesis, be an expansion of the cognitive horizon in encountering the body and ideas of a healthy being. There is also the impulse of adventure, especially in travelling to India, and the journey into and out of oneself. These elements are not (necessarily) tied to ideas of suffering (and escaping suffering), but might just as well reinforce an expansive life-force.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

### When and where does the change start?

... early to bed and early to rise, make a man or woman, miss out on the night life... (From “Early To Bed” by Morphine. Album: “Like Swimming” (1997))

Looking at a hotel room from the perspective of a headstand can be a horrendous and altering experience, especially if the view you have is of under the bed. This realization came to me in Brunei, and became a rather small, but significant insight into yoga’s transformative power. The inverted postures such as the headstand literally turn your perspective of your surroundings on its head. The actual, physical change of perspective that occurs in yoga might, at least partially, influence changes in other outlooks on life. Another easy way to change perspective, which, according to a few, might be helpful, especially in the practice, is actually changing the spot where you practice. In the Shala, and in other studios, there are many “spot huggers”. That is, people who will always try to be in the same spot when they practice. This is especially true for led class and among those who are the first to enter the Shala when it opens, since these are the only opportunities for actually choosing your own spot.

A few people admit to having their favourite spots in the Shala, or in their home studios. One woman said that she has her spot, which even her teacher recognizes and jokes about in an “I saved you your spot” kind of manner. Even so, she said that her best practice ever was the one time she was forced to take another spot in the studio. Even in the Shala, Sharath has jokingly been known to say, “Go to your spot!”<sup>119</sup> Trying to always practice in the same spot can also be seen as a way of trying to, in the practice, control as much of one’s environment as possible. It can be a way of isolating variations in the day-to-day practice, and trying to establish a practice with as few distractions as possible. Keeping to one particular spot can be a way of trying to establish and keep both social and cognitive order by controlling the social environment. It can be seen as putting things in their proper place, much in the way Mary Douglas (2002) explains purity. As humans, we strive to establish patterns, and thus order, as a way of making sense of our surroundings and of remaining in control. According to Douglas, this is done by comparison, that is, seeing similarities and

---

<sup>119</sup> In one case, it was a rather short girl who would often be directed to the right hand side in front where there is a lower ceiling and most of the students would have a problem raising their arms straight above their head.



differences, erecting and maintaining boundaries, and establishing categories (Douglas 2002). As such, it can work to cement perspectives on the world. Danger, on the other hand, is matter out of place (Douglas 2002). It is things that transgress the boundaries that we have erected and bring the system out of order. Such transgressions threaten our worlds and control. But as Turner (1979, 1997) has shown in his analysis of liminality, boundary transgression can also be a change of view. As such, practicing in a different spot might change the perspective of the practice and also lead to different insights because the environment in which one practices, and what one sees from there, will affect the practitioner, as will everything else in her surroundings while practicing.

Yoga, as an agent of change, can lead to vegetarianism, teetotalism, quitting one's career, teaching yoga, a belief in environmentalism, bodywork, such as massage therapy and acupuncture, early mornings and early nights. The changes are often seen as "automatic" or not rationally chosen – they just emerge because of the practice. Sonja, too, presents her story in such terms when I asked her how yoga has affected her life:

I think a lot. A lot. Like when I first started to practice, very fast I noticed changes in the food, that I automatically... Very unhealthy food and things were kind of... I didn't want to eat all unhealthy food. Hahaha. But it wasn't kind of like me thinking, it just happened. And also about drinking [alcohol], and all kind of stuff, you know? And then maybe also that I started quite fast the morning practice also. So if you have to wake up early in the morning, you can't really do a lot of things in the evening. So it started affecting on my relationship and my friends also. That I couldn't go out very late with them and do stuff. But I never kind of thought that as a problem. But in one point I noticed this, that ok, I don't go out so much anymore, and I don't spend time with people and my friends maybe so much. But in the weekends, and when I don't have to practice, then more. But... So I didn't have to make a very strong choice. Kind of, in the beginning. But then I think these last couple of years, it has been a little bit different. Like the practice it just goes deeper and deeper, and that's the one reason why I quit working in the travel agency. I couldn't really combine that with the practice. And I was also teaching for a while. So it was too much, and I wanted to find something that is good with this practice. That I can't have... I don't need to choose.

In the beginning, the changes were so subtle and gradual that she did not really think about them – she ate more healthfully, drank less alcohol and went out less during the

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

week. These changes did not arise from any conscious choice on her behalf; she just noticed, at one point, that her practice had gone deeper, and that she, to go even further, *had* to make some changes. Thus, she quit working in the travel agency, and she also stopped teaching yoga, as her own practice took more of her attention. The practice, at this point, became, more or less, the most important aspect in her life. More important than the practice itself, though, is the way the practice has changed her. She has become more focused in her life, and, as she puts it, she has become better able to “... understand and realize what I want. And what I don’t want.” It was a slow process that took her a couple of years. It was a big thing to leave a good job, to live with no money and to go back to school for a year. But, for her, it was the right thing. She says, “I’ve never been happier, I don’t think so. Hehe. But that kind of change - like the bigger change, like life changes - it came later.” So, though quitting her job and going back to school to study and to better accommodate her practice were tough decisions that wrought change, she has continued changing, and the practice has become more “spiritual”, as I will get back to in a later stage of my thesis.

The practice will bring change at some point, but that might also be scary. You have to take a closer look at yourself and who you are, or as Sonja puts it, in doing yoga you have to “Watch yourself in the mirror”.

For me that is very strange [that people come here for the social]. Well I can understand that, you know, but for me it’s just... I just come here for the practice and that’s it. And I find it so much easier here, to... like everything around here, is kind of supporting your practice. I find it like that. There’s less distractions. You know, it’s so quiet. Not so many bars around. Hehehe. People from back home, the friends... You can meet nice people here, and have relationships, but it’s kind of easier like if you’re not getting into that. Then it’s very quiet and easy, and you can actually concentrate on your practice like you could never in home. But this is also difficult, it means that you have to kind of be brave and honest. Cause this is what practice also does in some point of your life, I guess. That it makes you change your life, or seeing things differently about yourself too. So I think part of the social thing is that it’s almost easier to be around here with different people than by yourself, you don’t have to watch in the mirror. It can be difficult.

So, part of the change that might occur due to yoga practice is about getting to know oneself better, as I also discussed in the previous chapter, and which was Marianne’s

great frustration. Quite a few have dove headfirst into the yoga practice, practicing almost daily from day one. Getting fully acquainted with the whole commitment might take a while though; the early morning practice takes its toll on one's social life and makes it difficult to go out for late meals.

One question in these matters is, where does change start? Does some state of mind lead one into yoga, which then takes one further, or does one start practicing yoga by chance, thus making yoga the sole mover in the changes that happen? I think some state of mind is necessary. There has to be a reason for taking up the practice in the first place, and those who start practicing have to search for something, whether it is a slim body, better health, becoming more flexible or some spiritual release. There has to be a belief present in these people that yoga has something to offer them. Thus, they have, to various degrees, positive feelings about yoga, and are open to the possibility that some change might occur. That is, there must, reasonably, be some kind of intention behind the adoption of a practice such as yoga, in whichever guise it is taken up. This means that they, at least those embracing yoga more fully, have seen and experienced something that resonates with these intentions, or any adjusted intentions, and thus, that they are open to change. By intending to have some change then, changes of some kind will probably occur, though they can be rather subtle to begin with. It might be partially because these people have some faith in the practice that they, subconsciously accommodate their lives to it. They feel better practicing on an empty stomach and the practice is easier when they are not hung over. It is hard getting up in the morning if one is tired, thus, one starts going to bed just a little bit earlier. The practice is good, and the student experiences having more energy and patience, and being physically more at ease. Having recently picked up the practice, it is reasonable to trace these changes back to yoga. These ideas might be further amplified by the kind of image that yoga has as a life-changing cure-all.

Yoga as a practice – be it spiritual or more purely physical – mostly is not isolated or practiced separately from other beliefs or practices. The Ashtanga practice ties into other areas of life, and many of the practitioners in Mysore are, for instance, bodyworkers of some kind or other, or at least they make use of such bodywork as massage therapy, past life regression, meditation, acupuncture or physiotherapy. Which of these practices each and every physical change can be attributed to can, of

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

course, be debated, but the practitioners themselves often traced the source to yoga. The yoga practice has triggered a wider interest in the body and its well-being. As such, the changes that appear in a person’s life can, for some, be traced to processes that started before picking up a yoga practice. For others, the change started when they adopted the practice. Although, it can be argued that there was a change of mind before that time, which allowed the idea of starting to practice to germinate in the first place. Whether yoga *really* is the cause of the change is not actually that important. Yoga is either *the* agent of change, or it, at least, becomes a symbolic representation of change. This is not written in order to downgrade yoga’s ability to change a person, but to point out that it can be hard to exactly trace the source of change in a person’s life. That being said, many of the practitioners trace changes in lifestyle, life situation and view of life, more or less, directly to their practice. Change is attributed to the practice of yoga, and, in most of these stories, to the practice of Ashtanga yoga. Nevrin (2008) argues

... that MPY can be seen as offering discourses and practices that open up new spaces in which alternative ideologies and practices of the body can be explored, simultaneously offering opportunities for social empowerment and the formation of alternative social interactions (...) – resistance against conventional forms of sociality, as it were. (Nevrin 2008: 133-134)

The increased attention toward body and bodily processes that is prevalent in yoga can change how the world is seen and experienced. Focusing inwards, the world is seen through the body. The body, as I have shown, becomes visible and less taken for granted as the gaze is turned toward the physical and internal self. The body in itself comes to take up more space in the lived realities of the practitioners as they are taught to pay attention to what happens in the body during the practice, and as this focus is carried into everyday life. The breaking up of habitual patterns of movement and behaviour, and new (physical) experiences, also opens up for exploration, alternative ideologies and social relations. Nevrin (2008) links this to subcultural tendencies, or “... resistance against conventional forms of sociality...” (Nevrin 2008: 134). As such, delving into yoga practice is also delving into alternative views of society and reality in general. This kind of double perspective is a source of reflection and insight in itself (Bateson 2002; Langøien 2006; Turner 1979, 1992, 1997), and

can serve to break up taken-for-granted notions of self, world and being. This is similar to what happens to Baktaman neophytes who, through seven degrees of initiation are given ever more intricate keys to understanding their own society, and thus, are altering their life-worlds (Barth 1975). It bears resemblance to ndembu initiates who, by being shown a lion's body with a man's head, or a mask that is part grassy plain and partly man, are not only jolted into re-examining lions, grass and men, but also the relationship between them (Turner 1979, 1997). This can also be the message of revitalization movements, where the movement acts on visions of a restructured world, and can ultimately reconfigure the whole understanding of the world and society – the mazeway – of a person (Wallace 1979). Such detrialisation – highlighting what has previously been considered unimportant or just not considered at all – can affect and broaden the base of knowledge and be a foundation for radical reconfiguration of being and perceiving the world.

The Necker cube<sup>120</sup> (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 306ff; Rapoport 2011; Rosen 1994) can shed some light on the potential of learning that generally exists in unfolding the whole through double perspective. The Necker cube is a drawing of a cube where two ways of seeing it is possible, or it "... allows two perceptual interpretations..." (Rapoport 2011: 40). The cube can either be seen from below with "the face" down to the left, or from above with the face up to the right. Usually, a person sees one of the interpretations, but once he or she learns that there are two different ways of seeing the cube, the view switches between the two (with some time-lap).<sup>121</sup> The front and the back changes, reversing the fore- and background, and the ways of seeing the cube fluctuate. Though it is impossible to see the "two faces" simultaneously, they are both part of the same whole, i.e., the cube. Thus, the two are linked on "a higher level". The faces of the cube are both inside and outside and, though the separateness is not lost, a deeper unity is also gained (Rapoport 2011). As Merleau-Ponty (2002) writes of the cube:

This being simultaneously present in experience which are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of one in the other, this contraction into one perceptual act of a whole possible

---

<sup>120</sup> For illustrations see Merleau-Ponty (2002: 306) or [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necker\\_cube](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necker_cube).

<sup>121</sup> Based on Rosen's philosophy, this, according to Rapoport (2011), means that the sensing subject is an embodied participant in the earthly transactions of the phenomenological world (Rapoport 2011: 41), not just detached intellect, and thus, belying the Cartesian cut.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

process, constitute the originality of depth. It is the dimension in which things or elements of things envelop each other, whereas breadth and height are the dimensions in which they are juxtaposed. (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 308)<sup>122</sup>

The switch between the perspectives is contained in the Klein bottle (Rapoport 2011) as the foreground and background of the cube changes place, which is not possible in 3D alone. The two ways of seeing the cube are of the same order, or exist on the same level. Thus, they have to be “connected” at a higher order. The cube folds into and through itself, and the change appears through an invisible point – the neck of the Klein bottle – between the perceived 3D space as a whole and a space that cannot be perceived.<sup>123</sup> Through the double perspective of the cube, the learning mind, and thus, reality as perceived, is altered.

To detrialise and get an alternative view of the body (in yoga) and to “understand” yoga, the practice has to be experienced and appropriated. It is like saying, “You’ll know it when you see it,” or, “If you don’t know whether you’ve had an orgasm or not, you haven’t had one!”<sup>124</sup> Like the alternative perceptual interpretations of the Necker cube, once the other perspective is perceived, an alteration of the understanding has occurred. Yoga, as a community of practice, might be said to rest upon this shared experience of practicing. Through appropriating the same practice, “understanding” (through yoga) can be achieved between the students. Being in the Shala, doing the practice, chanting – *everything* – can become charged with meaning. This also explains how the world is changed (and created) through the appropriation of practice – new aspects and phenomena are charged with meaning, given value and “... cease to be mere “visual data”...” (Merleau-Ponty 2007: 144). Categories are established and the world is re-categorized, and hence, changed.<sup>125</sup> Reordering is renewing.

---

<sup>122</sup> Double description is vital in the perception of depth, like stereoscopic vision is fundamental in creating three-dimensional images because of asymmetries between images perceived by each eye (Bateson 2002; Rapoport 2011). I will return to the importance of depth further down.

<sup>123</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes: “If we want to talk about synthesis, it will be, as Husserl says, a ‘transition-synthesis’, which does not link disparate perspectives, but brings about the ‘passage’ from one to the other” (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 309). The Klein bottle might be such a ‘transitions-synthesis’, for instance in figure-ground reversals.

<sup>124</sup> Which is also saying that when change is perceived, it has already occurred (see Bohm 1995).

<sup>125</sup> This is also vital in regards to anthropological method. For the anthropologist to understand the visual data presented to him or her in the field, it is necessary to, in some way, make this behaviour

The body and the inner self do not exist in a vacuum; they are influenced by everything that happens in the surrounding. Thus, listening to one's body and to introspection would always imply listening to and being aware of how the body and one's insides – be it intestines, heart, hamstring or what not – react with the environment. The truth of this statement, and/or a person's willingness to embrace it, depends, of course, to the fundamental philosophy one lives by, or how the world is really made up. If, as proposed by some of the philosophical schools of Hinduism, the world and everything in it is but an illusion, it makes sense to turn one's gaze inwards, away from the false world, in order to expose the true illusive nature of one's own body as well. Cut off from the binding illusion of the outside world, the truth of the self is easier revealed. But if, on the other hand, the world is out there, and we are bodies in this world, we are forever bound to it, and the truth of our own being would include our embeddedness in that world. The connections between inside and outside would be vital, irrespectively of whether reality is fundamentally relative or given. The way we inhabit the world – the contact points and connections between us as bodies and our surroundings – would, either way, be fundamental to who we are, and our own perception of this.

### The paradox of love and detachment

The paradox of love and detachment might illustrate the tension that might emerge when students' perceptions of the precepts of yoga do not conform to personal values.

*Ina told how at one conference a girl had asked Sharath about a dilemma she had great problems resolving: "As yoga seeks detachment from this world, what room does this leave for love." To this girl's frustration, as perceived by Ina, Sharath answered somewhere along the line of: "At one point you get a family, and then you will have to adjust your practice accordingly." As Ina saw it, Sharath had just skated around the question, and the answer wasn't even close to touching the topic the girl had voiced. At another occasion, Susan, Ali and I came onto the same topic. Susan said she saw Rolf in Goa as this very loving person, to which Ali objected saying:*

---

one's own. The appropriation of behaviour – the participant part of participant-observation – is necessary to make the behaviour intelligible.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

*“That is not how I see Rolf at all, Rolf is very detached.” The argument that ensued turned around whether detachment excludes love and concern for fellow men. It’s worth mentioning that Ali is an Indian man, who have practiced yoga and have a lot of friends within the yoga community.*

What is love and what is detachment? In Europe and the USA, “love” has become one of the great paragons of our lives. Individually being able to give love, to exude love, to another individual or a group of people, is a matter closely related to life and death, and is, of course, also the topic of a broad range of movies, songs and books. In the West, love has been exalted to the highest pinnacles of being, as the most powerful feeling there is (perhaps besides hatred). Does the detachment sought in yoga really exclude such deep feelings for our fellow human beings? Does detachment entail being, but not caring? Being, but not attaching oneself to other people? Questions like these are what I believe the girl’s question stems from.

Love might have different connotations in an Indian context. Though, of course, being able to love, and to feel love, and making love the topic of countless books and movies like in the West being, “love” in India also has different connotations. As in *bakthi* yoga, the love of God entails submission and total devotion. This is much in line with a Western view, but in India, as in many places elsewhere, “love” doesn’t necessarily have the same social significance as the first and foremost mover in social relationships.<sup>126</sup> There is also more of a pragmatic stand for instance in questions concerning marriage and relationships. These are not solely designed based in feelings of love for another being, of *being in love*. Love might instead be allowed to grow in a marriage. Love doesn’t necessarily have to be perceived as this all-over-shadowing force that makes us act strangely and think like a fool – neither in the so called Western hemisphere nor in India. Perhaps Sharath even tried to accommodate the questioner by applying the notion of love to the sphere of relationships in his answer, but this is mere speculation. There is, at least as I interpret the question and

---

<sup>126</sup> In India there is a difference between *sringara* – erotic love – and *bhakti* – devotional love. (On “Indian love” see for instance Mitra (2006) and O’Shea (1998).) It must be said that love is not an unambiguous “concept” in the West either. There are differentiations of “love” between *eros* (“romance”), *agape* (“unconditional love”), *philia* (“friendship”) and *storge* (“affection”), but in the popular mind “love” usually seems to be a conflation of these aspects, perhaps with some weight being put on “romance” in common usage. (For a very brief description of the four, see for instance: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Four\\_Loves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Four_Loves))



the answer, a problem of translation here, as seen in the frustration of the girls and in Ina who felt that the question was very important and that Sharath's answer missed the mark.

Detachment is not the same as carelessness, or rather: It is not the same as not caring, or not seeing others. Rather it is not being dragged down or getting caught up in these things, but rather being able to stay somewhat collected observing it. It is possible to care and love without being devoured by it.

The questions about love that were asked at the conference – and similarly questions about God, which I will turn to in Chapter 8 – is, I think, an attempt to negotiate and make sense of key notions in one's own life which are seemingly at odds with certain notion within the yoga philosophy. The people asking these questions have come upon certain incompatibilities, and are trying to resolve them. If the negotiations “fail” and Sharath interpretations and answers don't do away with the uncertainties, some kind of crises might ensue, but they can also to some degree be written of as “cultural” differences, or that the Indian notions of God, love and religion are different from “ours”. The troubles are thus not fundamental differences in being, viewed from a practitioner's perspective. The paradoxes are resolved by way of these notions, and thus are not allowed to threaten the commitment to the practice.

For those adopting yoga in a time of crises, yoga can be likened to what Wallace (1979) calls a revitalization movement. When stress has build high enough, and old ways of being in and seeing the world aren't adequate – or cannot be adjusted to fit the current life-experience – individuals are thrown into a state of crises. A mazeway is a person's perception and image of the world (based on his or her individual experience), and under stress (i.e., when this pattern is under attack and threatened by damage), the individual have to decide between keeping the mazeway and live with the stress, or try to refashion a new mazeway that reduces stress. Yoga and building a personal practice can in such cases be interpreted as a new mazeway. Yoga practice becomes the foundation for a new life-world. Revitalisation movements usually are rather violent transformations, but they can also be transformed into reform movements. In Mol's (2002) vocabulary, yoga is enacting a new mazeway or life-world. As Wallace writes: “Changing the mazeway involves changing the total

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

*Gestalt* of his image of self, society, and culture, of nature and body, and of ways of action” (1979: 423). Part of the enactment, and thus creation, of this new life, should in yoga be due to “just surrendering”.

## 6.2 Awareness and consciousness

In this part, I will turn my gaze to the mind and attitude *within* the practice. That is, what kind of state is to be fostered *when* practicing? I have touched upon “awareness” as a key term – awareness of body, movement, and reactions throughout the practice – and here I will try to further get a hold of the rather slippery terms used to describe one’s experience of the practice “on the mat”. As we will see, the experience and the vocabulary vary between notions of “awareness of self and body” and “loosing oneself in the practice” or “being lost in oneself”. Dealing with these matters can help us to understand such notions as ‘doing’ and ‘undergoing’ (Dewey 2005) and how ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) and meditative experience can be partial in the transformative experience of yoga. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991) flow is “... a state of concentration so focused that it amounts to absolute absorption in an activity...” (1991: back cover) Introspection can denote both flow and self-awareness during practice. Being present in the practice can allow a practitioner to explore and discover the potentiality of his or her body, and thus be foundational to reconfiguration and detrialisation.

### Mindfulness, absentmindedness, and minding your own business

*Moving through led class on February 25<sup>th</sup>, was a mixed pleasure. This day the Shala was extremely hot and clammy. I was sweating like a maniac. Saraswathi pushed us through four sun-salutation Bs, instead of the usual three, and this being a Friday, I was already tired from the four previous days of practice. It kept on “raining” and the pond of sweat on my mat was growing. Looking around, the girl to the left of me and the boy to the right looked unperturbed – no sweat. I became very self-conscious, not wanting to spray them. We were really crammed together back there. Unfocused I kept looking around, but seeing Mick, also drenched in sweat, made me calm down a little. In general the atmosphere in the room felt a bit strange. There seemed to be some kind of uneasiness there. There was no clamour or anything, but everyone*

*seemed “unfocused”. In utthita hasta padangustasana<sup>127</sup>, which is a balance posture, many seemed unbalanced, and a woman in the back fell on the woman next to her, whom Saraswathi was assisting, and both students ended on the floor. After the first seated posture, dandasana, I bent my legs, and was on the verge of jumping back, but caught myself and bent forward instead. This made me even more aware of being slightly out of sync this day – and becoming too focused is seldom a good thing. My sequence became more confused. In ardha badha pascimattanasana I started with the left leg – though we always start with the right – and sat 2-3 breaths before becoming aware that I was doing the opposite leg of everybody else. From here on I kept in line. I just kept doing the postures, and everything was flowing fine. We came to upawisthakonasana, and I slid to the front of the mat. In this posture you spread the legs wide, and bend forward, so you are in need for a bit of space. In the Mysore practice, where everybody does the sequence in their own tempo and very few are at the same posture, this is no problem, but in led class it’s harder to get enough space. So people tend to go to the front or back of the mat, or turn sidewise to make space for everyone to spread out. So I sled forward, spread my legs, took hold of the sides of my feet, lifted my chest while inhaling, and sunk my head to the floor while exhaling. Saraswathi counted the five breaths of the posture, and inhaling I came up, only to realize I was in the wrong posture. Everybody else was doing badhakonasana. Even though Saraswathi during led class calls out the name of the next posture when we are about to enter it, I had completely tuned out from her instructions! I had no idea where I’d been in my head – if that’s the right expression – and I’d been totally oblivious to everything going on, whereas at the beginning of the class I had been extremely aware of my surroundings. The rest of the postures went without incident, although I was extremely tired and drenched in sweat at the end, and the mix up had left a strange feeling.*

The feeling of suddenly becoming aware of what I was doing was very strong, and that partly came from being so unaware of what I was doing and what I was supposed to do. Standing outside the Shala afterwards thinking back, I thought that perhaps I had been thinking about *upawisthakonasana* before getting there. This is a posture that I have been working on because I have quite tight hamstrings, and I like it rather

---

<sup>127</sup> All postures in this part are pictured in appendix 2 page ix, if nothing else is noted.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

well. Perhaps, the anticipation of the posture made me jump ahead and skip *badhakonasana*? I have experienced skipping postures before. For instance, I have gone from *marichiasana D* and straight into *bhujapidasana*, and have skipped *navasana*. *Navasana* – the boat posture – is tiresome and tough, and while *bhujapid* is hard and challenging, it is a hand balance that I am quite fond of. Also, sometimes during the sun-salutation Bs<sup>128</sup>, I have suddenly started wondering whether I have done the *vidrabadhasanas*, and whether I have done both sides before going into *adhomukhasvanasana*. At such points, I have tried the pose one more time, and still have not been too sure. Somehow, my body might feel like I have done the pose, but I am usually not convinced. So I continue the practice, trying to focus a bit better.

I talked to Greta over a coconut outside the Shala after the first incident. She had made the same observation as me. Many of the students had been uncommonly out of balance. Mick for instance had fallen over in *setu bandhasana*. (Greta on the other hand had been unusually balanced and steady.) Talking about my absentmindedness, she said it is actually very interesting, asking: “Were you unfocused or very focused?” It ought to be said that Greta works in academia and has done research into movement and bodied experience. She said that it isn’t necessarily because one is unfocused that these slips in the sequence happen. It might just as easily be because one is in *deeper* concentration and *more* focused. Not picking up on what is happening all around you, the body just acts without the mind “interfering”. I am not sure whether I was deeply into the practice, or if it rather was because of a lack of concentration, but in general this is hard to tell. Being absorbed in something there is a moment of confusion when consciousness kicks back in.

So what happens in these situations? Is the lack of attention to what is being done a result of not being present, not being aware, or is it rather that I was so deeply *in* what I was doing that my surroundings fell away and I didn’t reflect upon or react to it? In a time of flow my autopilot kicked in. Afterwards I couldn’t grasp where “I’d been” and what I’d thought about, or if I had been thinking of anything at all. Lack of reflection and conscious doing can be both “positive” and “negative”, if we are to evaluate it at all in this connection – it can be a sign of both absence and immediacy

---

<sup>128</sup> Sun salutation B is pictured in appendix 1 page v-vi.

in the situation. In any case these moments of seeming inattentiveness are interesting as they highlight the notion of both being present and loosing oneself in the practice.<sup>129</sup>

My last practice in the Shala during my 2011 stay, March 1<sup>st</sup>, was also strange: *After finishing the standing sequence I jumped through to the seated sequence. I did the first pose and then jumped back to do the vinyasa – something was very strange as I jumped back. My rug was in the way, something I had never experienced before, but I just thought; “I’ve must have done something strange when jumping – probably jumped too far back or something,” so I just did the next pose. I jumped back, and the same thing happened: I landed on the rug, and had to walk my hands and feet forward in adhomukha to keep my heels away from the rolled up rug. “What was I doing wrong?! I have to pay more attention when jumping back the next time!” I did the next seated pose, and jumped back again. This time I jumped all the way over the rolled up rug at the end of my sticky mat – and though it isn’t unusual for me to jump a little bit off the end of the mat, the rug has never been a problem. I was really getting annoyed now, and I just couldn’t understand what I was doing differently during this practice! 30 days I’d be doing this same practice in the Shala on this trip, and I’ve done it countless times before, and this was the first time I’ve ever had a trouble with the rolled up rug! Suddenly it struck me! I hadn’t rolled out my rug! Usually I roll out my rug, on top of the sticky mat, at the end of the standing sequence and before entering the seated sequence! I had completely forgotten to roll out my rug, and I had jumped back three times, found the rug in the way, and with growing annoyance tried to figure out what I was doing wrong! I hurriedly, and with some embarrassment rolled out my rug and continued into the sequence, but couldn’t quite shake the feeling, all the while wondering why I had forgotten to do something that is almost as ingrained in my practice as the sequence itself. Also wondering why it had taken me such a long time, and so many jump backs to understand. Was it because Saraswathi was assisting the Irish guy to the right behind me in most postures? Was I already leaving in my mind, and thus just unfocused on my last day? Or was I rather that focused on the practice this last day? Did I just want to make the best of this last day in the Shala? I don’t really know.*

---

<sup>129</sup> 124825022011

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

It’s not easy to really know what’s flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) and what’s absentmindedness, since flow also is characterized by a kind of absent mind. Flow itself is usually described as “just doing” without reflecting upon what is being done. Everything just flows naturally and beautifully. The mind is absent, and if you start thinking the flow stops. Flow is a positive feeling of “just being”. Absentmindedness on the other hand is usually negatively described as not being present, being elsewhere, and just not thinking, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary online.<sup>130</sup> But as flow is also described as non-reflection, non-thinking; the mind is also absent. The “being present” of flow, is also being “absentminded”. There is doing and being, and when the reflecting mind enters the doing, flow is usually lost. Loosing oneself in yoga, or any other activity, is characterized by positive connotations of absentmindedness. Just when there is confusion about whether a posture has been done or not, the absentmindedness can be seen as negative.

Absentmindedness, reflection and flow, links to notions of consciousness and unconsciousness. Benjamin Libet (1992) has in a series of experiments explored consciousness and unconsciousness. According to Libet (1992) neural processes precede the conscious intention to act. The ‘readiness-potential’, “a recordable indicator of related cerebral neuronal activity” (Libet 1992: 263) or a kind of “preplanning”, begins first, and only after a substantial lag, there is subjective awareness of the wish to act or move. As Libet writes: “... the brain has begun the specific preparatory processes for the voluntary act well before the subject is aware of any wish or intention to act...” (Libet 1992: 263; see also Dubois 2010) After this awareness has occurred, control can be taken, and control implies imposing change. Interpreting these experiments, this means that volitional acts are initiated unconsciously, and *never* conceived consciously before they are conceived *unconsciously*. “... there is no place for the conscious brain to create or launch future event...” (Dubois 2010).<sup>131</sup> Consciousness has no creative power, and its role is to say

---

<sup>130</sup> Absentmindedness: lost in thought and unaware of one’s surroundings or actions : [preoccupied](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/absentmindedness); also : given to [absence](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/absentmindedness) of mind (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/absentmindedness>)

<sup>131</sup> Interestingly Dubois (2010) “disperses” the neural brain beyond the “natural brain”. The neural ectoderm – the outer bacterial layer of the embryo – gives rise, not only to the brain, but also the spinal cord, the nervous system and the skin. The neural ectoderm, and thus, all of these aspects of the body constitute the “neural brain”. Intelligence is a property of the brain integrated in the biological body as a whole, and the body is integrated in its terrestrial environment, via its skin. This might be an

NO to or veto actions suggested by the unconscious. The conscious will can only block performance (Dubois 2010). “Free will” is thus this power to control the outcome of the processes initiated unconsciously (Dubois 2010; Libet 1992). Though it can be argued that the duality of consciousness and unconsciousness is a simplification (e.g., Bateson 2000e; Bateson & Bateson 2005), Libet’s experiments are interesting in inferring that the conscious self-understanding is fundamentally *false*. If consciousness can only say NO – never “Yes” – to the unconscious (or non-conscious or pre-conscious) commands, a temporarily lack of consciousness implies that this NO will not occur as long as this state is sustained. Usually such periods are of limited duration, but flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) might be just such an instance when the conscious NO is avoided, and the unconscious reins. This is plausible as neither time nor energy is wasted on saying NO. Whether the consciousness says NO or not have to be “controlled” by meta-algorithms in the differential epistemology (Johansen 2008; Riegler 2007<sup>132</sup>). If the meta-algorithm does NOT fire the NO-algorithm, the pre-conscious is let through. That is, in flow the unconscious mind acts, rather than the conscious (and as such “absentmindedness” might be slightly off target as a term (if not how it is experienced)). This is related to activating the potential for improvisation (Jørgensen 2004), where improvisation denotes an immediate or spontaneous act that is not reflected upon, based on proficiency and creativity (Jørgensen 2009). This potential for improvisation has to be learned and practiced though, which is similar to reaching “meditative” states in *asana* practice, or learning to meditate in general. This also implies that “flow” – or *not* saying NO, or saying NO at different points – can be learned and utilised, and Csikszentmihalyi writes that yoga is “... one of the oldest and most systematic ways of producing the flow experience” (1991: 106). In learning one learns to say NO at different points than previously, until this NO-algorithm gains such *importance* – in Riegler’s (2007) terminology, meaning being widely applicable – and is abstracted to such a degree that it becomes automatic. The extreme case being the samurai who through repeatedly practicing one selected sword movement, or inscribing movement patterns by *kata* learning, should be able to execute it and thereby kill his opponent even though he lost his head in

---

interesting point of departure to explore additional aspects of the embodied mind – or “enminded” body. As Dubois (2010) writes, “The whole skin has a lot of sensors, connected to the spinal cord by nerve fibres. These sensors give information on touched things and the tactile experience on own body as the target. Experience of touch play a role in self-consciousness” (Dubois 2010: 241).

<sup>132</sup> I will get back to Riegler’s (2007) theory in Chapter 8.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

battle.<sup>133</sup> That is, there is no NO (from the conscious mind) if none of the critical input-factors that says no is present. Learning can be explained as inscribing new patterns of triggering, or schemata of actions and conditions (Riegler 2007) and “...the more often a schema has been carried out in the past, the higher its probability of being executed in the future” (Riegler 2007: 110). Dubois (2010) writes:

The unconscious mind might be defined as that part of the mind which gives rise to a collection of mental phenomena that manifest in a person [sic] mind but which the person is not aware of at the time of their occurrence. These phenomena include unconscious feelings, unconscious automatic skills or reactions, unnoticed perceptions, unconscious thoughts, unconscious habits, and learned things that are done without thinking. (Dubois 2010: 238)

Libet (1992) and Bateson (2000e) also list well-rehearsed, known and automated actions among unconscious acts. As Bateson writes, the unconscious contains “... many matters which are so familiar that we do not need to inspect them” (Bateson 2000e: 141).<sup>134</sup>

A problem, which is seemingly ignored in Libet’s (1992) material, is that it isn’t possible to say NO to something without this something having been perceived and thus having already been said yes to, since it is *about* something.

To alleviate this problem, we can here talk of input and output that are algorithmically differentiated. Especially along what Johansen (2008) calls the trans-algorithmical dimension, which can be regarded as an analogue with Bohm’s (Bohm & Peat 2011) super-enfolded order. In his terms, we can label the input as supra-conscious, activating a *new* meta-algorithm as a vertical input. This introduces depth, which is vital for understanding the relationship between algorithms of the same order

---

<sup>133</sup> On the samurai and the “mushin” (no mind) see for instance Moore (1995) and Young (2009).

<sup>134</sup> If these insights holds true, that all creativity is unconscious and that consciousness can only veto or say no to what happens there, this might be an interesting parallel to Raknes (1927) theories of ecstasy and the reorganisation of the mind. Raknes claims that the mind can be restructured or recalibrated in ecstasy, and that this might recount for “meeting the holy” and the psychological foundations for religion. Ecstasy can be a source of new insights, prophecy and artistic creativity. But, in order to carry the visions from the ecstasy into “ordinary life,” the person has to be strong enough to retain the insights. Maybe learning, in Riegler’s (2007) notion, or learning to keep the NO at bay, may be a way to carry the ecstatic insights into conscious thought, and becoming conscious of the potential that exists in the unconscious. Also Wallace’s (1979) theory of revitalisation movements and Edgar’s (2011; see also comment in Morgenbladet, Olsen (2012b)) exposition on “The Dream in Islam” would be interesting to reexamine on such grounds. This is also interesting in relation to Bateson’s (2000e) view of art and “primary processes”.



(Johansen 2008).<sup>135</sup> That is, such an understanding requires a description of relationships between algorithms of *different* orders. The meta-algorithm thus structures the relationship between different algorithms, while describing the relationship between such structures, requires the existence of meta-meta-algorithms, etc. (Johansen 2008). There is as such a hierarchical organisation of algorithms, which means there is depth, and thus enables *vertical* movement.<sup>136</sup> Subtle processes of learning might be able to rise upwards in the trans-algorithmical hierarchy, thus confronting input of a higher order that might be vetoed or not. Consciousness can thus choose to say NO or not to a kind of input that previously didn't exist. When learning is done and comes to an end, having put the optional NO in its right place, one can let this meta-algorithm, which is of a higher order, unfold without being vetoed. Thus there is flow.

It might thus be better to consider the unconscious and conscious mind or unconsciousness and consciousness, in Libet (1992) and Dubois' (2010) terminology, as structures in terms of algorithms and meta-algorithms instead of as dualities. It can be argued that the mind is absent in flow since there is no need to say NO. This is an absence of second order, though, since the mind says no to veto the action, in *this* context. As such it is absent, though it is the mind itself that has *said no to say no*. The mind is absent because the mind has decided to be absent, or it has blocked itself, from taking control and vetoing an action.

Even small things, such as a rolled up mat, can create new perspectives. Suddenly the body feels different. Being present in body, and absent in mind, or being mindful of the practice, and not of the surroundings. Being present in the practice, and absentminded of the surroundings. There are many ways of trying to frame the ideal state (of mind and body, or body-mind nexus or whatever) of the yoga practice. Being present in body might be a bit misleading, since the body is after all present on the mat. This is different from being *present in* (and thus acutely *aware of*) the body. But even loosing the sense of the body, as in a state of flow, is idealized by some, and thus being present in the practice or even just doing, might be another way of putting it.

---

<sup>135</sup> Rapoport (2011) regards the depth dimension of Merleau-Ponty (2002) as analogues with Johansen's (2008) trans-algorithmical dimension.

<sup>136</sup> On hierarchical structure see also Riegler (2007).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Being present *in* and aware *of* differs very much, as being aware *of* might actually mean being too conscious of what is being done, while being present *in* might actually be a better way of framing the meaning of being aware of what each and every movement and breath entails. Both being present *in* and aware *of* connotes being “mindful”. While *being present* might mean both absentmindedness and being mindful. What it usually boils down to either way is minding your own business, and doing your practice. What practicing does to your mind, body, or physical and mental dispositions – that is; your body-mind nexus – and thus your perception (in a wider) of the world, is to offer a new perspective.

The yoga way of directing awareness to the body in practice, which here might mean both being aware of the body in the practice and reaching a state of directed concentration – or unconscious acting where the conscious NO is postponed – or absorption in the practice (*flow*) (Csikszentmihalyi 1991), is important. Writing about ritual healing, Csordas (2002a) points to a “rhetoric of transformation” saying that it turns “... the supplicant’s attention to new aspects of his actions and experience...” (25). Such rhetoric is a way of making the “patient” see aspects of his or her life from a new perspective, and as the way we attend to our experiences constitute the meaning of these experiences, such change of perspective creates new meaning. Elucidating this, Csordas writes that to “... the extent that this new meaning encompasses the person’s life experience, healing thus creates for him a new reality or phenomenological world” (Csordas 2002a: 25). Ritual healing thus entails the creation and inhabiting of new life-worlds by redirecting the supplicant’s attention. Thus endorsing turning the awareness towards and into the body in yoga practice can be a powerful way to initiate change in the lived realities of the students’. Merleau-Ponty (2002) holds that paying attention brings new articulation to data by making them *figures* (2002: 35). It might be a way of becoming aware – after the fact – of unconscious acts. In Dubois (2010) words, “The conscious will, when we come aware of it, is the same as the unconscious will...” (2010: 243), or as Bohm (1995) notes, when we become conscious of change, the change has already occurred. Attention is “... the active constitution of a new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon” (ibid. Not paginated). Or as I established by the way of Fyhn (2011) in the previous chapter, form manifests from the formless. Csordas (2002b) turns to the processes by which

we constitute our bodies as objects. These processes are *somatic modes of attention*,<sup>137</sup> which are "... culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body..." (Csordas 2002b: 244) in environments that includes embodied others. The somatic modes of attention are altered by yoga culture by redirecting awareness towards the body and way of being in the world, thus unfolding new meaning and utmost new realities, if encompassing the person's life experience.<sup>138</sup>

In Mysore I generally tried to reflect upon my how I had experienced the about hour and a half in the Shala afterwards and write down a few comments to myself. I could usually easily write about how I had performed in the *asanas*, where in the sequence I had been struggling, what I had achieved and not. It was much harder to get a grip of what I had been thinking, and how I had experienced the flow and such things, especially if I had a (so called) good practice. There was just the feeling of time flying by, and smooth motions. I had been in there, done my practice, and then had a coconut afterwards, feeling deliciously tired, calm and invigorated at the same time. Here is an example of an entry:

*I was a bit tired today, so it was a bit tough getting through the practice today as well, but when I get going it feels very nice anyway. I feel like I'm working quite well in several postures, I'm pushing myself a bit. So I guess that's partly why I'm as tired as I am. Saraswathi helped me with the left foot in the balancing posture - utthita padangustasana<sup>139</sup>. Stian adjusted me slightly in warrior 2, and helped me with badhakon – he pushed my thighs a bit. I was a bit worried about my knees so it's possible I held back slightly, but I did get a bit deeper than I usually do on my own. I'm still not able to keep my legs behind my head in suptakurmasana. They just pop back out. Would probably be good with some help there. I still have some trouble with*

---

<sup>137</sup> Recall note 131 on the neural brain on page 212.

<sup>138</sup> These notions – being aware of and present in – are somewhat parallel to Geertz (1993a) and Kapferer's (1984) exchange on ritual participation. Geertz (1993a) claimed that the "deep players" where those who would gain most insight into own culture and psyche through ritual participation, while Kapferer (1984) argued that those who were deepest in participation were too engaged to be able to gain general insight. Kapferer (1984) claimed that those at the fringes of the ritual gained perspective and thus, are more able to reflect on the ongoing spectacle. I have argued elsewhere (Langøien 2006) that both participation/deep play and reflection are vital, in creating double perspective (Bateson 2000).

<sup>139</sup> *Utthita padangustasana*, *badhakonasana* and *suptakurmasana* are depicted in appendix 2, page ix.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

*bhekasana*<sup>140</sup>. *I’m not quite able to place my hands correctly, and therefor I’m not able to lift my chest enough either. I feel that dhanurasana and parsvadhanurasana are ok now. I’m very happy about my practice these days, and happy about the postures I’ve been given, though I have this small voice in the back of my head saying it would be fun to get one more. This despite the fact that we shouldn’t strive for asana. I probably wouldn’t have gotten so many new postures if I had been practicing with Sharath – maybe none. I would have done just primary since I can’t get back up from the backbending on my own. I find that very hard. Today I tried to just go for it, but my knees gave way. I have two-three days to work on it. It would have been really fun to be able to do it soon...*

Such notes, these from my diary from February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011<sup>141</sup>, are typical for my reflections on my own practice. It’s rather physically oriented – often measuring my own ideas of progress and setbacks – but there are also some reflections on how certain postures feel. I evaluate both my own practice and my own thoughts, for instance catching myself in wanting more postures. I was, and still am, quite proud of doing a few *asanas* from the second series, and these days – this being written in March 2012 – I long for those postures, as I have given them up, and am instead focusing on getting up from *urdhva dhanurasana*. Although these notes from my diary evokes a lot of feelings and memories in me – of walking to the Shala in the morning, of certain postures, Saraswathi’s voice, being adjusted, getting extremely tired, and the taste of coconuts after practice – the description of my experience of the practice, and being in India in general, seem life-less and extremely dry in hindsight. The inability to recall the actual experience of the *asanas* doesn’t necessarily mean that I usually was inattentive though. As indicated above, it might likewise point to an absorption in the movements of the sequence, and what is clear is that “my body” (mostly) remembers the order of the postures, and how to execute them. The *asanas* have become embodied.

Our very language sometimes defies us in trying to grasp what happens during practice, as elsewhere in life. The fundamental notion of the mind-body dualism is very hard to escape both in talking about the practice with other yoga practitioners, in

---

<sup>140</sup> *Bhekasana*, *dhanurasana* and *parsvadhanurasana* are depicted in appendix 3, page xix.

<sup>141</sup> 124123022011

writing about the experience of the practice, and in trying to convey the practice anthropologically. Absentmindedness, being mindful and minding your own business, requires a mind that can be absent, present or minding, and using these phrases (re-) establishes notions of such an entity. Yet it is hard, given our language, framing these experiences in other ways. The language we try to convey our ideas and experiences through rests on and establishes categories we perceive as being “out there”. Even in saying that we are focused or unfocused, we posit something that can be focused or not. In talking about the “body” the body is re-composed as a separate category and entity. Even such notion as the body-mind-nexus fosters ideas of two entities tangled up together, and mutually independent. The mind *is* the body, and the body *is* the mind. There are no separate entities, no clear line that can be drawn between them, but talking and writing “body” and “mind” forces a wedge between them no matter how much we are kept being told there is not.

We are told that yoga works to dissolve the division between the mind and the body – these are part of what is being yoked through the practice. Through the practice we should supposedly realize there is no gap between the two, rather mind is body and body is mind and they are united, as they should be. The Western duality is just an illusion, and yoga enables us to transcend this illusion. In talking about this though we are as mentioned betrayed by the language we employ trying to frame these notions. The duality of mind or soul and body, spirit and matter, is to such a degree ingrained in the way we speak that even in trying to convey the experience of the practice we tend to keep mind and body as separate entities. We talk of mindfulness, absentmindedness, and minding our own business, and we talk of the body being tired or feeling strong. We give both the body and the mind their own will so to speak, and they can work in the same direction or in separate ways. “The mind was willing but the body weak,” or “The body felt strong, but mentally I was tired.” Again and again the division is refurnished with reality. As yoga practitioners have a hard time resolving these oppositional forces, so do the theoreticians. This part has been an attempt at resolving the dichotomy. I will now turn to other influential aspects of the yoga practice.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

### 6.3 Yogis and Bhogis<sup>142</sup>: Negotiating and unfolding core principles of being a yogi

Some have come to yoga to look for answers to their larger questions of life, and they go to Mysore in the belief that it is the place where the answers can be found. Once there some are afraid that the answers might pass them by without being noticed. The debates on *asana*, *ahimsa*, *santosha* and the question of *yogis* and *bhogis*, are directly related to the students’ ideas of what the essence of yoga and a yoga practice is and should be.

In a conference, Sharath, on February 13<sup>th</sup>, was talking about what yoga is and what it takes to be a yogi when he said that yoga has changed in the West. In the West there are many *bhogis*, as opposed to *yogis*, he said. The *bhogis* only do the physical practice, and are into “the enjoyment of the senses”, while those following the principles of yoga, most importantly the *yamas* (*ahimsa*, *satya*, *asteya*, *brahmacharya* and *aparigraha*) and the *niyamas* (*shaucha*, *santosha*, *tapas*, *svadhyaya* and *ishvarapranidhana*<sup>143</sup>), are *yogis*.<sup>144</sup> As he said, everybody in the West is now able to talk nicely about the aspects of yoga, but few practice it fully. Every aspect of the yoga practice, and not only the *asanas*, have to be done practically. When Guruji said the practice of Ashtanga yoga is 99% practice and only 1% theory, this was what he meant, according to Sharath. “Practice” includes *ahimsa* (non-harming) and *santosha*, for example. If you compete in yoga, for instance, you are not a yogi, even if you compete only with yourself. *Santosha* means contentment, and so you should be happy with what you have and not strive for further *asanas* or anything. To be happy is to be satisfied. The topic of *santosha* lingers in discussions on competitiveness in the practice and ego-driven behaviour, as I have discussed. If you always think good

---

<sup>142</sup> Bhogis are those who are attached to sensational things (i.e., things of the senses). *Bhoga* means sensual enjoyment. (Liebermann 2008: 114, n. 1.)

<sup>143</sup> A amusing aside might be that David Garrigues actually turns to Gregory Bateson in explaining this concept in a blog post called ‘Everywhere looking only God seeing’ (Quoting Pattabhi Jois) from September 3rd, 2012:

At the root of the practice of Isvara Pranidhana, devotion to the lord, is to see what Gregory Bateson called ‘**the pattern that connects**’, and that is to see the fundamental interrelationship of everything in existence, unerringly simple yet seemingly vexingly complex (<http://www.davidgarrigues.com/articlepeacepilgrim.html>).

<sup>144</sup> On several occasions he also stressed that none of us, including himself, are true “yogis,” rather we are “practitioners”. Practicing the principles of the *yamas* and *niyamas* is necessary, however, to become a yogi. See page 9 for a brief presentation of the *yamas* and *niyamas*.

thoughts – this according to *shaucha*, one of the *niyama* – you will be clean inside, and this should be “completed” with external cleanliness. *Tapas* (discipline) is another important aspect. Without discipline, you will be distracted, you will not be able to control the mind, and you will not practice. Self-study (*swadyaya*) and surrendering (*ishwaraprandidhana*) to God are also central, and according to Sharath, surrendering to God can, by itself, lead to *Samadhi*.

Many yoga practitioners, and particularly some of the more dedicated, will react negatively if “yoga” is judged solely on the physical practice of *asana*. Elias was one of these frustrated people, who commenting on the priorities of other students said: “The only thing that counts are those two hours [in the shala]! There is so much more to the yoga.” And he told a story of how somebody actually had started crying because he on a particular day had not been able to touch his feet to the head in *viparita chakrasana*<sup>145</sup>, a 3<sup>rd</sup> series pose, and his fellow students had sympathised and comforted him. One such incident made a bad practice, and a bad practice ruined the whole day. Two Swedish girls actually admitted that a bad practice could make them cry and ruin a day.

Damien’s view on different styles of yoga, which was presented in Chapter 4, does not completely keep him from being judgemental, though he is conscious of this conundrum. The statement he makes in these regards is illustrative of his ideas of what it takes to be a yogi:

And so yeah, I try to watch myself with that. That I’m not being judgmental. But... like I was saying; I’ve worked through so much stuff - physically, mentally - that when I see people that are struggling with things that aren’t really that tough. I judge them harshly sometimes, and I shouldn’t. I try not to judge people on their *asana* practice. That’s why I don’t watch second series led classes, I don’t care who’s doing what. Like, if I get to that point some day; great, I’d love to do it. But, you know, I’m trying not to forward think too much about it. And then also, the people that are doing the full second series, I don’t... There are a lot of status games here, and I don’t like to buy into those status games. For me it’s more about how you treat people. How you treat people that can’t do anything for you. You know, people that aren’t important or necessarily going to give you something. If you don’t treat them as an equal then you’re...at heart... Then you’re really not that kind of a person. If you’re selective about whom

---

<sup>145</sup> See appendix 3 page xxix.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

you want to be around, and who you spend your time with, based solely on how much status or influence those people have, I don’t agree with that. It’s silly. So yeah, I see a lot of advanced yogis here that are really pissy with the local Indians, and rude with the waiters and servants and stuff and I think, yeah, they’ve mastered some *asana*, but they still have a lot of *yamas* and *niyamas* and philosophy to figure out, you know? Practical application into your life. Again like my first teacher, the *asana* should have practical application in your structural function, and the philosophy should have practical application in the way you interact with people.

Rather than judging based on *asana* practice, he judges peoples’ willingness to work on their issues and how hard they are willing to work in general, not least on their willingness to embrace the whole yoga practice, and not just the *asanas*. Damien’s main issue with other people is as such their lack of willingness to practice all the eight limbs of Ashtanga yoga, and what he calls status games. By status games he means the way some will use their practice of advanced *asana*, their connections to Sharath or the more established teachers, or their years in the practice in trying to establish themselves within the Ashtanga yoga community. It does not really matter to him whether or not anyone is able to do advanced *asana* or not, as long as they among other things treat other people right, without any thoughts of what they can get in return from these people. As he says, the whole philosophy, including such notions as *santosha* (contentment), *shaucha* (cleanliness) and *satya* (truthfulness), should be applied to life as lived.

*Ahimsa* is an important aspect of the practice, and this quote from yoga student Shelly Smith’s blog<sup>146</sup> on going vegan point to some broader notions of *ahimsa*:

WHAT DO VEGANS EAT?!? I get asked all the time, and as a new vegan I’m learning to prepare fresh, delicious food that’s beneficial for ME, for ANIMALS, and for OUR PLANET. Sustaining a nourishing plant-based diet will require being creative, conscious and conscientious in my food choices. Here I’ll share a “learn as I go” adventure on the path to healthy, happy, VIBRANT VEGANISM! (Shelly Smith)

Eating meat involves killing and is not *ahimsa*, killing bugs is not *ahimsa*. Being vegan even brings less harm to the planet according to Shelly. Doing harm to

---

<sup>146</sup> “Ingress” from her blog “GOING VEGAN: A Daily Diary of My Food Evolution” (<http://myfoodevolution.blogspot.com/>)



anything or anyone, including yourself, is a violation of the principle of *ahimsa*. Quite a few yoga students, myself included, have experienced that people look at them a bit askew if admitting to sometimes eating chicken. Marianne was rather taken aback when I told her I eat meat back home, but that eating vegetarian in Mysore is so easy, so I do not do it often there. She said that by eating meat, I was at least partly responsible for creating much suffering.

The degree to which yoga students are able to live up to the ideals of yoga life varies greatly. Does *ahimsa* stretch to swatting mosquitos in the Shala. Sharath, somewhat jokingly, called out “*ahimsa*” when someone smacked a mosquito, but in another class he himself swatted his neck hunting one. Are cockroaches exempt from the rule, and does the fact that they are crawling into your bed alter anything? What about spiders? These issues are discussed and talked about in Mysore – both playfully and seriously – and if somebody say they had to fight an invading army of ants, or sprayed a cockroach, they might be mildly scorned with the word “*ahimsa*” – sometimes jokingly, at other times not. Such jovial discussions and relatively “mild” sanctions can tell us that these are rather small ambivalences within the yoga community. These examples also tells us, though, that there *are* disagreements and uncertainties as to how embracive and strong these categories of purity should be, and how they are to be symbolised. These exchanges can be termed “joking relationships” (Gundelach 2000; Freedman 1977; Radcliffe-Brown 1940) and as such they are partial in drawing and renegotiating boundaries of socially differentiated groups (Gundelach 2000). In joking relationships the joker and the butt of the joke are connected by some social relationship, and the joking is partial in structuring and defining this. In the yoga community, such joking can be a way of negotiating the importance of and relative strength of certain rules and norms, as well as the influence and relative depth of engagement to these rules among the yoga students. Joking is also a way of negotiating tension (West 2001) that can emerge within the community as a result of the ambivalence of precepts and the difference in commitment to them, as well as contesting power relations (Dwyer 1991) – or ideas of elite and “purity”, which in the yoga community often translates into relative influence on the practice, as I have shown in Chapter 4. As such killing bugs is a milder ambivalence that eating meat, which can earn stronger sanctions.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Purity is also directly related to the first *niyama*, which is cleanliness (*shaucha*).

The first *niyama* is *śauca*, cleanliness. Śauca has both an inner and an outer aspect. Outer cleanliness simply means keeping ourselves clean. Inner cleanliness has as much to do with the healthy, free functioning of our bodily organs as with the clarity of our mind. Practicing āsanas or prānāyāma are essential means for attending to this inner śauca. (Desikachar 1995: 101)

Cleanliness, or *shaucha*, is to be followed (according to Sharath) in order to practice yoga correctly. Cleanliness in this aspect is both outer and inner cleanliness, that is; it is the idea of a clean body as well as a clean mind. Having a clean mind also includes thinking clean or pure thoughts, and this is something we have seen is not that easily maintained even within the yoga community. Ashtanga practice in itself is thought to be cleansing. The first series (*Yoga Chikitsa*) heals the body and cleans the grosser parts of the body, while the second series (*Nadi Shodana*) cleans out the nervous system, by “... opening and clearing the energy channels” (Miele 2007: 2).

The ideas of purity also cover dietary rules. In “Yoga Mala” Pattabhi Jois (2002) prescribes a *satvic* diet, which is vegetarian and does not include any spices and is restricted also in other ways. On a question on the difference between a vegetarian and a satvic diet, spices became a topic. A satvic diet differs from a vegan diet since there are no prohibitions against dairy. Satvic food is seen as pure food.

Sharath had some additional remarks on diet and food at a conference in February 2011. Ghee is good, and one should take two spoons daily to sharpen the brain. Milk is drunk to increase the lifespan. If one eats too much potato the joints will become stiff because of all the starch. When talking about meat he takes a “what you eat is what you become” approach. Eating meat creates extra meat in the body; i.e., eating flesh creates more flesh. As eating meat also creates lots of muscle, the body will be stiffer. We also have teeth like a cow, not like a tiger, which shows that we as humans are really meant to eat vegetables. According to Sharath, eating meat, in addition to causing suffering, will increase the anger one feels. Except for meat, other animal products can be taken/eaten as long as it does not involve hurting the animal. For protein, one should eat lentils, ragi, or if you cannot get ragi, millet. In general,

whole-wheat corns are good for fiber. But diet is not only a question of what to eat, but also about how much and how many times. Sharath related a saying which went something like this: “Eat once and you are a yogi, eat twice you are a *bhogi*. If you show me a man who eats three times, I will show you a sick man. And if you eat four times, you will be taken to the graveyard.” One should not eat more than the body can digest, and practicing yoga and doing exercise is not a reason to eat more. Rather, in practicing yoga one does not need too much food, and one large meal should suffice. “Otherwise you will get a big belly,” as Sharath put it. Bad food leads to a bad mind. Good food, like satvic food, on the other hand, leads to a healthy mind.<sup>147</sup>

Food was important for other reasons as well, and there are several reasons for eating vegetarian food, or adopting a certain diet. The rigorous practice makes it necessary to eat to get energy and to let the body regenerate. “I need my carbs” and, especially, “I need my proteins” were often heard as people were trying to find suitable protein sources apart from their regular substitutes of soya and other stuff. One main reason for eating a certain way is simply how it makes the body feel and perform in the practice. We were talking about food at Sri Chakra once, and Adam said that meat is not good for yoga, as the body feels heavy. He can feel the difference physically: “Meat takes so much longer to digest. Your body feels lighter without it,” he says.<sup>148</sup> Cindy says she is vegan, but she eats dairy – which in itself is a contradiction. Further, she says: “I crave egg when I haven’t had enough proteins. But as long as I control my proteins it’s better.” She eats scrambled eggs perhaps once a year. “When practicing yoga, after a while you just don’t want meat.” Many say the same thing: you just stop craving and you feel better without it.

What makes the body feel good are not organically grown vegetables for all, though. In Chapter 5, I mentioned a girl who ate fat and ghee to keep her ass from disappearing. She needed meat for protein and to feel better, and she said that, since people and bodies are different, they also need different food. Lewis is also a man of somewhat peculiar tastes. Although many of the other students sympathise with his diet of raw food, few would adopt his habit of eating raw meat. Claiming that all food loses important nutritional components when boiled or fried, he ate mainly different

---

<sup>147</sup> 093027022001

<sup>148</sup> 151508022009

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

shakes and raw meat marinated in honey, as well as milk and cheese, which he made himself. He did not eat bread, and without the meat he would feel lousy, as he did after he spent a week at Amma’s ashram in Kerala. “I feel like shit if I don’t eat meat,” he said. He said that even the Dalai Lama says it can be okay to eat meat if one needs it, and if it is ok for the Dalai Lama, then he does not need to dwell on that question. To get the beef, which was what he preferred, he had to go the Muslim neighbourhood close to the St. Philomena Cathedral because beef is prohibited among Hindus.

In denying certain foodstuffs, though this varies from practitioner to practitioner, and banning alcohol and other intoxicants, as well as in requiring discipline and dedication, we can look to the ideas of purity and cleanliness in order to get a better understanding of the precepts in yoga. As Cartmill claims: “Almost all ancient vegetarianism was rooted in eccentric minority doctrines about ritual pollution or reincarnation, not in any belief in the value of animal life” (Cartmill 1993: 40).

Not only the notion of vegetarianism, but also all the rules of yoga practice, and the discussions that surround them, which I have touched upon, to some extent or other, can be related to ideas of purity, in Mary Douglas’ (2002) sense. As wholeness is holiness (Douglas 2002), and being whole means conforming a certain category, all these debates are ways of trying to establish exactly what the categories “yoga” and “yogi” contain, but also which rules are more and less important within the practice of yoga. The more one is able to fit within “yoga” as a category – which depends on what elements or sub-categories yoga consists of – the purer, thus more whole, and ultimately “holier” one is. In demarcating what kind of food is permitted and not, one also establishes boundaries between oneself and others.

As seen with the invading ants, some rules of yoga life are easier and seemingly more important to uphold than others. Rules also apply to varying degrees and at specific times. Roger makes such an observation, when saying:

If you go out and hunt a deer, it’s living a natural life, you know, that’s living in harmony with nature. That’s the food chain. And you also see a lot of people here, and they talk about, “oh, non-viol... you can’t kill mosquitoes cause that’s, you know... Yoga is supposed to be non-

violent” But yeah, they ignore something like *brahmacharya* [abstinence/continence], you know... sleeping around with everybody in town. People are very selective about what they believe is fundamental to yoga and what’s not. And I think a lot of it is not about yoga, it’s more about people’s attachments to various ideas. As far as eating meat, I don’t... Some people I don’t even talk about it with, you know. Like even talking with somebody, with other people around, and kind of whispering: “yeah, there’s a place you can go and get meat” cause people, you know, they look down on people who eat meat.

Eating meat can generate sterner reactions than a joke, and certain of the eight limbs are more strictly adhered to than others. In Roger’s view, this is partly because they are easier to observe. Perhaps it’s also because it is easier to monitor *ahimsa* – in this case pronounced as vegetarianism – than where people spend their nights. The students’ various attachments to ideas pertaining to yoga practice, is also a testimony to how individual students associate their practice with different values and behaviours based on one’s own experience. The eight limbs of Ashtanga yoga should, according to Alter (2008), not be understood as “... socially valued ends in themselves...” (Alter 2008: 44). Rather they are “...means to the end of enstatic<sup>149</sup> transcendence” (ibid.: footnote in original). Despite this, the limbs are gradually being interpreted as ends in themselves, which is making yoga a way of developing “morals, standards of good character, and civic-mindedness, and the performativity (...) lends itself very well to advocacy for social and moral reform based on the “virtues” of *yama* and *niyama*” (ibid.).

Vegetarianism and other aspects of yoga practice become regulative symbol aspects (Krogstad 1989) in the yoga community, and those who do not adhere rigorously to less ambivalent matters, can earn reactions from their surroundings. Meat becomes an impure and boundary breaching substance that can act to order relations between people who practice yoga. Anna touches upon both regulative and declarative aspects (Krogstad 1989) of having a certain diet when we talked about vegetarianism and eating habits among yoga students:

You become very fundamental and difficult to be around, and... Now I try to not be like that, but... But like, for my family, if they are to invite me for dinner, they think “wait a second,

---

<sup>149</sup> “A term coined by Mircea Eliade to indicate the way in which yoga produces an internalized, embodied experience of externalized ecstasy” (Alter 2008: 47, n. 3).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

what does she eat?” and... I don’t eat meat, and only that is... I just eat kind of usefully. More useful than most. That might frighten people. (...) I’m not a vegan. So... for me it’s not difficult... I don’t think that I’m extreme... There is a health trend in society. But those who haven’t really followed that [trend] at all... For them I’m extreme. [My translation from Swedish]

Food habits and other norms delineate between yoga practitioners as well as between practitioners and non-practitioners. Interestingly, Anna also relates yoga practice and the accommodating ideas of food, to the societal focus on health that has emerged in later years. (Which will be the topic of the next chapter.)

Practicing in Mysore is easy, since everything supports the practice. The communality of the practice is supportive, but it also acts correctively on individual practitioners. Feedback from teachers and other students sanctions the practice and behaviour of all students. This might be part of the explanation for the transformational power of practicing yoga in Mysore, as yoga is the only thing that has to be done. The Ashtanga practice separates these yoga students from both practitioners of other yoga styles, and from people who do not do yoga. The Ashtanga practice thus has declarative symbolic function (Krogstad 1989) as it sets the Ashtanga yogis apart from everybody else. As Ashtanga is practiced in a set series, and “deviant behaviour” is sanctioned, there are regulative (Krogstad 1989) sides to it as it is easy to “rank” the practitioners according to dedication to the precepts and advancement throughout the sequence. The ranking of teachers as authorised and certified also acts to regulate the relationships between students in Mysore as some people are recognised as having more legitimate authority than others.

Change does not only come about because of internal “development”, but also because of “outside” critique. Sometimes outside critique resonates well with one’s own experience and serves to separate students from the Ashtanga practice. At other times the critique is found unjust and instead serves to tie students tighter to the fold. Investing in the practice the students commit themselves to Ashtanga yoga.

Having broken off from the Ashtanga practice, George made a similar observation:

Yeah... Because you have two choices when you practice. If what we're saying is true, if there is a negative energy in the Pattabhi Jois Shala, you can either join it, hahaha, or... and accept it. It's kind of like an ac... like an acceptance of it. Or... you don't approve and go elsewhere. So if you keep going in... If you still practice in there, and you still... there has to be some type of wall that you have to... it might just be a wall that you have to put up. And that... has been my observations on some people. Having to put up a wall. If something happens in front of their eyes, or they hear something that they don't want to believe, they just block it out.

In George's view then, the students are kind of socialized into "excusing" the things one might observe in the Shala that is counter to what is perceived as "proper" yoga. Any negativity is either taken upon oneself, or just denied. Any problems in the teaching will reflect badly on themselves as well. Thus, they either defend what is going on, get upset if anyone criticizes the Shala, Sharath or Saraswathi, or they just block out and under-communicate (Goffman 1990) the things that do not suit their view.

The essence of yoga is also questioned and debated in academic studies these days, as I have touched upon and is a part of. These debates on the history and authenticity of modern day yoga are related to the "Mysorean" debate on what constitutes "real" yoga. That this is debated – and that these debates are influenced by both academic and "theological" viewpoints – shows that "yoga" today is a dynamic practice where the rules – if not actually "random" – are at least interpret- and negotiable. Singleton and Byrne (2008) says:

Liberman argues that in modern times, yoga and *bhoga* (sensual enjoyment) are not easily distinguishable. He questions the belief of many modern practitioners that there was once an original and pure yoga that now serves as the basis for the contemporary practice of yoga. This, he argues, is a "just-so story" that belies the true syncretism of contemporary practice. (Singleton & Byrne 2008: 10)

Though Liberman (2008) according to Singleton and Byrne (2008) questions whether there has ever been a pure and original yoga, he also enters the debate on the essence of yoga, what traditional yoga is/was, and what a "yoga practice" should contain, and among other things he asserts:

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

The system of yoga of Patañjali, and all yogis since have included the *yamas* and *niyamas* or something similar that refers to basic moral practices such as honesty, good will, selflessness, and the like, without which a daily practice cannot be considered “authentic” yoga. Accordingly, these need to be made a part of the regular and daily instruction in yoga classes worldwide. The situation today is that less than a small percentage of yoga students in the world can correctly identify the *yamas* and *niyamas*, let alone practice them. This is a scandal. I am speaking here of only the basic elements of what is traditional in yoga. (Lieberman 2008: 112)<sup>150</sup>

Another small anecdote to illustrate that there are other important aspects of yoga practice than just the *asana*, is Sharath’s answer to a question asked at a conference in February 2011. Somebody asked Sharath what he thought about practicing *asana* twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. His response was threefold. His first response was: “You don’t work hard enough?” Then he kind of chuckled and said something along the lines of: “When people leave here in the morning they seem tired enough on their wobbly feet.” He then closed the topic by saying: “If you have more energy, you should use it in some charity [work] instead.”<sup>151</sup>

#### 6.4 Shared practice and a fellowship of sufferers: The interchange between experience and social norms

... real perception that is capable of seeing something new and unfamiliar requires that one be attentive, alert, and sensitive. In this frame of mind, one *does* something (perhaps only to move the body or handle an object), and then one notes the difference between what actually happens and what is inferred from previous knowledge. From this difference, one is led to a new perception or a new idea that accounts for the difference. (Bohm 2004: 5)

---

<sup>150</sup> Lieberman interestingly enough makes himself a spokesperson for yoga and the yoga community, or rather he speaks for the “traditional yoga” and tries to establish some common ground on which all yoga can be deemed “authentic”. At one hand this is interesting as it echoes the concerns of many of the yoga students I encountered in Mysore, as well as Sharath’s statement that we have to practice *yama* and *niyama* to actually practice yoga. Lieberman is basically saying we should be *yogis* rather than *bhogis*. This also touches upon the question of research ethics. Lieberman is concerned with the corruption of yoga as a practice, something he shares with many yoga students and teachers the world over, and in this he is less concerned with what is, than with what should be.

<sup>151</sup> 211228022011



Being introduced to Ashtanga yoga, most students become acute aware of how their movements and bodies change. Paying attention to themselves in the practice they can feel how moving through the *asana* has an impact, and they experience their bodies differently from before. Coupled with the philosophy and ideas of yoga, as well as the socially transmitted opinions of different aspects of the practice, the personal experience of the postures and other regimes of the practice, influence and shape the practitioners knowledge and perception of yoga, self and environment. Significant changes are noted, embodied and made part of the practicing self. Intentional actions, and the feedback gained thereof, work themselves back into the practice and shape it further. Though the practice after a while can become habitual and taken-for-granted, one is always encouraged to stay focused and attentive. This awareness can lead to further insight due to subtle changes. One learns how one's own body feels in the *asana* as well as in daily motion, and by paying attention to one's own reactions, one appropriates behavioural patterns that fit with one's intentions, and further adjust the ones that do not. Thus unfolds the personal practice into and under the influence of the surroundings, in an ever-interdependent motion.

(Creative) changes, also due to yoga, can happen when one is committed and alert, to one's thoughts and actions, and thus also in the practice. Being aware of the differences which make a difference (Bateson 2002), and not "falling asleep" in mechanical thoughts and habitual behaviour, one can use these insights to try create some correspondence between one's experience of one's own body and nature on the one hand, and the actions by which one tries to work with these on the other. (Bohm 2004) Being aware of the practice's impact on the body and one's own impact on one's surroundings and actually behaving accordingly, and not mindlessly repeating older patterns or trying to recreate someone else's actions and perceived results, one can make a change in one's own life. It is very easy in yoga, as in most other endeavours in life, to chug along in one's habitual way, or to try to take shortcuts by just adopting someone else's recipe for "the good life". Paradoxically, though one of the main refrains in yoga is to "listen to one's own body" and "be introspective", it seems to me that many teachers and students are eager to share and spread their own revelations, and students appear to be eager in trying to reproduce others' experiences rather than "analysing" and reflecting upon their own. As identified by other students, this might be partly because they are lazy, afraid of being wrong or do not trust

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

themselves. It might be important to note here that many of the teachers expounding upon their own experiences do not, as I have experienced it, necessarily do this for others to copy them or because they think they have found the *only* right way to do yoga, but rather to share their experience – as a way of being an example, or an inspiration – and to say “it can be done”, and this was how I did it. They cannot control how it is received, though, and many students cling on to their teachers’ words as being *the* truth, without really reflecting upon how it resonates with their own experience of the practice. As such, instead of change, yoga can produce behavioural patterns in students that do not really reflect those students’ experiences of the practice – or more in line with Bohm’s (2004) vocabulary: Yoga can create mechanical thoughts and behaviour in students who lack awareness and who are too afraid to look at and reflect upon how the practice – and the experience thereof – corresponds with their ideas and notions of both self, yoga, and the world in general. This a concern expressed by yoga students, as I have shown.

The interaction between individual experience and social context is important as an instigator for reflection, though. The internalisation of social norms can take place when there is adequate resonance between the individual’s intentions for his or her practice on the one hand, and the socially conveyed intention and interpretation of the practice on the other. The students somatise socially significant ways of being and thinking as they experience some recognition of their own plight and they are able to make sense of their own experience within this context. There can be embodiment of socially relevant ways of being – implying the establishment of “... long-lasting dispositions of the body and mind...” (Shilling 1993: 149, note 1). Byron Good (1994) writes, in an article on the body and illness experience, of Brian, a young man suffering from chronic pain. As the doctors strive to find the source of the pain, and fails time and again, Brian experiences that his life-world is unmade every time a promising diagnosis is proven wrong. This experience he describes as a breakdown of reality (Good 1994). In the instance of pain and suffering in yoga practice, sense-making can happen whether the suffering is alleviated or “just” made significant. If the suffering could not be explained in any way, it could threaten the life world of the practitioner.

The body is historically and socially constituted based on biological foundations – as well as having been biologically altered because of historical and social impact. Writing about dieting as modern asceticism Twigg (2011) asserts that:

Diet and dieting are attempts to mould the body into a form that is acceptable to modern taste; they are about the achievement of an idea, the accomplishment of a programme of personal self development carried forward at the level of the body and offering dreams of happiness, success, popularity and acceptance. (Twigg 2011: 239)

Yoga can equally be a practice undertaken to achieve some idea of how the body should be. In the practice the committed student tries to mould his whole being into the ideals of the yoga philosophy. The eighth limb is a script for achieving these dreams, and significant others in the students' lives – be they other students, their teacher back home or Sharath and Saraswathi – are guides who influence how each person makes his or her choices within this matrix of practice, experience, philosophy and social life. These actors, together with each practitioner, negotiate how the ideas of yoga are to be achieved – but importantly also how yoga is significant and meaningful in each person's life, since this is not given. As such this amounts to what the Manchester School denotes as praxis (Evens and Handelman 2006), in the interwoven unfolding of yoga theory and practice. As a flexible system, yoga can be moulded to fit the needs of most people – and these needs can span everything that Twigg (2011) mentions. In turn yoga moulds the bodies and ideas of these people. Yoga resonates rather well with modern (or highly modern) body projects, in people seeking "... this-worldly forms of salvation through their bodies and the control of them" (Twigg 2011: 240).

The ever ongoing debates of what yoga is and should be, as well as Sharath's expositions on yogis and *bhogis*, has an impact on the values as well as the intentional behaviour of the students, giving them some kind of chart to adjust their practice, imagination, and gaze along. These things are perhaps the most important feedbacks on their behaviour apart from their own practice. Through "trial and error" these evaluative hierarchies are embodied or somatised as long as they are not too counter to the student's own ideas of the outcome of their practice. These ideas are continuously negotiated, and though the students have invested a lot of effort in their

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

practice and some have tied their own ideas of self closely to their ideas of the Shala, there is little automatic appropriation of new ways, as seen in the critical voices of some of the students. The notion of suffering is an example of how some phenomena are made meaningful in the context of yoga practice, even in the face of injury and continued misery.

The practitioners engage in a personal and social practice, and yoga has to be seen as both a personal and social commitment. It’s not only a commitment to oneself, but also to one’s fellow practitioners as well as to the system and its teachers. Committing also means that yoga students invest a lot in the practice – they invest time, money and energy. Participation in common practice means that there is potential for common experience and thus a foundation for interdependence and solidarity among the students. The common practice creates sensitivity, empathy and an ability to identify with other practitioners. They become a community of “fellow sufferers”<sup>152</sup> so to speak. This can be likened to *communitas* as established in the liminal phase of rituals (Turner 1979, 1992, 1997). Especially in Mysore, the students are jolted together, and, apart from differences in their yoga background, all become students of the same teachers, and line up together in the hallway and share the same space for practice. Though the practice is the same, we cannot know, of course, if all the students have the same experience of it. As some people do not feel at ease in the Shala, and decide to leave and, perhaps, practice elsewhere, we can say they do not have the same experience. What they do is create and adopt a common language to express and interpret their experiences of the same postures. They go through, more or less, the same thing in and around the practice in Mysore, and they have, more or less, the same commitment to the practice back home. They can be anti-social and keep to themselves. “Everybody” knows how emotional and personal the practice can be, and they share something that all find important enough to spend so much time and money on. In Mysore, everything evolves around just this practice.

In the following part, I will situate yoga as a practice within a larger societal or global context. Throughout this part, I will revisit and fold yoga as a practice back into some

---

<sup>152</sup> Keep in mind that suffering is not the sole emotion felt, and suffering here also connotes the existential suffering espoused by the traditional yoga philosophy as the basic characteristic of human existence.

of the topics raised in Chapter 3. Chapter 7 examines yoga in relation to issues concerning health and healing, and establishes yoga practice in relation to modern-day fitness trends and body-projects. The chapter following this questions yoga as religio-spiritual remedy and a quest for significance. In Chapter 9, I will focus on the “global” discourse on Ashtanga and other styles of yoga, and also how yoga is seen by the larger public. As such, I am, in these three chapters, trying to ascertain how the Ashtanga practice is influenced both by other surrounding practices, and how yoga is both influencing and influenced by a public view at large. This includes looking at how economic interests are seen as threatening and possibly changing Ashtanga yoga, and part three in general touches upon how yoga students are trying to safeguard the “sanctity” of their practice.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## **Part three: Yoga practice, worldly matters and otherworldly issues**

Modernity turns out to be enigmatic at its core, and there seems no way in which this enigma can be “overcome.” We are left with questions where once there appeared to be answers, and I shall argue subsequently that it is not only philosophers who realise this. A general awareness of the phenomenon filters into anxieties which press in on everyone. (Giddens 1990: 49)

... yoga, as a way of life and as a philosophy, can be practiced by anyone with an inclination to undertake it, for yoga belongs to humanity as a whole. Is not the property of any one group or any one individual, but can be followed by any and all, in any corner of the globe, regardless of class, creed or religion. (Jois 2005: 10)

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"



## 7: Health and fitness: The body of modernity

Especially when I work with really ill bodies, because bodies get ill. As we get older, 40, 50, when you don't do anything to the body, they get ill, so sometime I can only do... I can only promote the physical aspect of yoga, and say maybe a little bit about the connection between the mind and the body, if you... Yoga will heal your body in all aspects of it. Muscles, bones, systems, organs. And I try to tell them exactly. Will flush things out, like kind of visualize what will happen in the body, because when people are very physical and material they don't even have this visualization of what it is that they are carrying. Generally speaking I always say that yoga heals everything. (Helena)

Helena's statement points to prevalent ideas of the connections between yoga, the body and health. The message is: Yoga, even as a physical practice can be a powerful curing agent, if done correctly. This healing of the body is the first step of the *asana* practice, and as mentioned the primary series is designed to do just this. Pattabhi Jois also claims that yoga has this healing effect, when he in the "Yoga Mala" writes:

Trough the practice of yoga, many types of incurable ailments, such as asthma, can be cured, and the body, mind, and, senses will come to radiate with a new energy. Indeed, some physicians who condemn the science of yoga have been dumbfounded to find former patients of theirs being cured of their diseases by yoga. This is borne out by experience. Diseases that cannot be cured by medicine can be cured by yoga; diseases that cannot be cured by yoga cannot be cured at all. That is definite. A doctor can find remedies for illness that result from an imbalance of the three *doshas*, but no *dhanvanthari* [doctor dealing in medicine] has a remedy to offer for mental illness.\* Yet yogis say that even for this, there is a yogic cure. Indeed, the practitioner that keeps faith in and practices the limbs of yoga can achieve anything in the world. He can even redo creation.\* (Jois 2002: 29, \* footnotes have been omitted.)

There is a yogic cure of everything, according to Jois (2002). This cure goes beyond the merely physical though, and might be a part of the reasons why yoga has popularly come to be viewed as a remedial practice. Such an "inclusive" way of denoting and interpret notions of health and ailment, might be part of a more encompassing tendency. Saillant & Genest (2007b) writes that:

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Whereas 18<sup>th</sup>-century medicine sought to banish the environment, interiority, and subjectivity from the medical gaze, these are precisely what sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history have tried to reintroduce. (Saillant & Genest 2007b: xxv)

As the social sciences and the humanities have tried to reintroduce societal and environmental aspects as vital in issues concerning health, yoga and other so-called alternative views have focused on the situatedness of the human being. Eastern notions of health and body have often influenced them. Such “Alternative” views of health and healing can, like alternative social organisation, by themselves be seen as a form of critique of not only modern medicine, but of central values of modern society in general.

Jois (2002) and Saillant and Genest (2007b) say something about the views of health and body that are prevalent in yoga and anthropology respectively. The anthropological view of these subjects can be seen as part of a larger societal trend where alternative more holistic ideologies have gained more influence, while the yogic view has been one of the perspectives voiced in this growing myriad of voices. As the story goes, the subject and the subjective experience of body, health and healing might drown in the Western<sup>153</sup> medical view, where numbers and standard treatments rule the field. The subject might feel invisible and left out of the equation if he or she does not fit “regular” patterns of illness (Good 1994: Chapter 5). The more inclusive gaze that the social sciences and humanities strive for according to Saillant and Genest (2007b), is also prevalent in yoga and in the Indian medical gaze, and seems to be sought after by and present in the experience of practitioners. Most yoga practitioners see some connections between body, the practice, general health, healing and well-being. In this part, I will look into health and healing in yoga and how it is related to notions of body in “Western” society and in the yoga community.

---

<sup>153</sup> The term “Western” here is clearly not adequate since the medical view is international. I use it here to mark its European-American origins. Other terms used to describe this tradition have been “modern medicine”, “scientific medicine”, “biomedicine” etc. Leslie and Young (1992b) have proposed the term cosmopolitan medicine. They also present different arguments as to why other terms are not as fitting (1992b: 5-6). It is also important to note that, although “Western medicine” shares some foundational characteristics around the world, there are specific regional perspectives and several distinct ways of practicing/approaching it. Child-birth is for instance viewed differently in the USA and France (Martin 1987). See also Saillant and Genest (2007a) and Lock (2002).

Although practicing only for health, a firm body, or enjoyment is not the correct method, according to Jois (2002), yoga is seen as powerful and with a potential to heal, or at least to aid the healing of most physical and mental ailments. This message is conveyed both in the yoga literature and by the students themselves. In addition to the above, in “Yoga Mala” (2002) Pattabhi Jois writes that, “If *asana* is practiced, then bodily and sensory diseases will be destroyed” (Jois 2002: 18).

Although originally a religious practice, “health” has been and is a key issue in much yoga practice. During the 1930s in the USA “... the health and beauty benefits of yoga were being separated from the idea of the evil occult swami” (Love 2010: 256), and yoga has been used to cure assorted troubles from alcoholism and drug abuse to mental illnesses, melancholy and physical ailments. This has been the claim of many teachers and practitioners since the introduction of yoga to a Western/American audience near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Love 2010). Both tales of the personal experience of many practitioners and the marketing ploys of some studios seek to testify to the wonders yoga can work. Pattabhi Jois ascertains yoga’s healing capacities, while yoga’s calming effect was stated in the exclamation; “These people would be up on a roof with a gun if they didn’t do yoga,” by a student over breakfast at Om while discussing the benefits of a regular yoga practice.<sup>154</sup> The people in question were somewhat hyper-active people who, who still extremely active, had found a way to channel off excessive energy through the practice. Another woman thanked Ashtanga for taking her out of 20 years of addiction to cannabis/hashish.

Why is this focus on suffering interesting anthropologically? Why is this interesting when we are regarding modern society? Briefly put, as touched upon in Chapter 3, there is much focus on stress relief, coping with everyday life, and the meaning of life. We are very well off, but some have problems perceiving meaning in the way we are living. And there is also the *added* suffering due to a larger focus on health, wealth, success, and career. These things have to a larger degree been added to each person’s burden as something they alone are responsible for acquiring in their own life. Life has been largely privatized and individualized, and the pressure to be and present oneself as successful is ever growing.

---

<sup>154</sup> 081816062009

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

The yoga body is and becomes an expression of a larger societal trend of (late-) modernity, where the body and its physical and mental grooming is both a health precaution and a social obligation, and the fit body becomes a symbol of success and high standing. The modern-day body has become an ongoing project to realise and strengthen the self. At the same time, there has been an upsurge in emphasizing emotions, experience and connection to the body – in short a focus on “knowing thyself”. Being and becoming healthy is a personal responsibility, but also a social obligation, as individual illness and disease are collective challenges (especially in countries such as Norway where welfare systems are highly developed) through hospital bills and a decimated workforce. The body has as such grown in significance, as is seen in newspapers, magazines and other media, where health, exercising, dieting, and other bodily oriented activities have come to cover ever more pages. The general attitude towards health and healing might also be changing, as illustrated by the opening quote of Saillant and Genest (2007b), which points to attempts at redressing the perceived imbalances of modern medicine. Yoga, though many practitioners would deemphasize these aspects, fits rather snugly within such developments.

### **The lived experience of body, health and healing**

The error in this type of Western medicine is that none of us is standard. Medicine by the numbers (statistics) has conferred great advantages overall, but may not be effective for particular individuals. In the practice of medicine, we cannot predict which individuals will benefit from a particular treatment and which will suffer setbacks. (Womack 2010: 239)

The perhaps most astonishing story of healing was supplied by John. John is in his 50s, and told me how he had been in a severe car accident 7 years ago. Several of his vertebrae had been crushed. The doctors were first amazed that he survived at all, and were awestruck when he regained the ability to walk. John had never practiced yoga before the accident and was introduced to it as a way to recovery. He is now a yoga teacher, something he decided to become as soon as he was recovering. The doctors use him as an example of “miraculous” recovery. John talks of the accident as an epiphany that showed him that life is short and he had to change his life. As he tells it, the recovery through yoga made him leave everything to delve into the practice. He

decided to become a yoga teacher to give something back to the practice, and to give to others what he had been given.

Though less severe, Andreas' story of how yoga was introduced to him to remedy that he was burned out from working too much, is also enlightening. Yoga was introduced as a part of the rehabilitation together with other exercise and advice on nutrition:

[I started yoga, it must be five years ago,] because I had worked too much and was on sick leave because I was burned out. After a while I came to a clinic where I went through rehabilitation, in several different ways. There was an advisor on nutrition and exercise to help you get back to a normal life, and he suggested that I start doing yoga. So basically I tried, at the beginning once a week. So it was kind of an order, although it really was a suggestion. Kind of: "This is something that should suit you, considering how you have toiled and been living." So I started doing yoga – once a week. [My translation from Swedish.]

Interestingly, for both Andreas and John life-crises and the introduction of yoga for therapeutic means altered the course of their life and their views on what's of importance. John saw the futility of his life before the accident, and altered his life-course. Andreas still contemplates what he is going to, but considers narrowing down his advertisement business, and only promote "sustainable" and "moral" organisations and products. For both, yoga has become a foundation in life and for a new lifestyle, and life has gotten a different significance.

Another interesting story of healing is that of George's heart. Upon applying for a position as a nurse, he was told they could not hire him because he had a heart arrhythmia. As a trained nurse, this arrhythmia was something he had always been aware of, but he never had any symptoms. He saw them as PACs, premature arterial contractions. To get the job, however, he needed a full cardiac work-up. He could not afford this, partly because he did not have any health insurance at the time. Thus, he decided to go to Thailand – where he had had knee surgery, the outcome with which he was very happy – to do the heart surgery, as well as to take a course in Thai massage. Upon arrival, he was examined, the arrhythmia was confirmed, and a surgery was scheduled. When in Thailand, he met a yoga student who told him about an Iyengar teacher in Rishikesh. He went there before the surgery, and eventually travelled south to Mysore, where he met his current teacher. After practicing with him

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

for a while, George suddenly realized the heart arrhythmia was gone. Although there is no “proof” that the cure came from yoga, George himself connects the disappearance of the arrhythmia to his practice with his current teacher.

These three stories are about recovery on several levels. On John’s part it deals with recovery from near fatal physical trauma and injuries. Andreas’ story is about recovery from more lifestyle-related ailments, while George talks about the cure from a heart condition he probably was born with. In the stories, yoga is seen as the cure. Whether the cure can be “scientifically” traced back to yoga or not is less interesting and important, than the fact that these people trace their recovery back to their practice and that yoga is experienced as the healing agent.

Many yoga practitioners not only have great faith in yoga, but they also have faith in the powers of the body in general, and they claim that the medicine of the Western medical tradition can facilitate cures, but when ill, the body can only heal itself – or put differently, you heal yourself. Where most people do not know or understand how they feel, and thus, blindly trust their doctors, yoga practitioners are more aware of their bodies and know how to listen, according to the practitioners themselves. Penelope, who sprained her ankle badly falling down the stairs outside the Shala, listens to her body to know when to start practicing again. She did the same thing when she hurt her wrist once. She did not wait as the doctor cautioned her, but started slowly when she felt ready, and the wrist healed. Marvin told a similar story. When he was young, he hurt his back lifting some heavy object. He did not do anything about it, and was bedridden and troubled with much pain. A few years ago, he hurt his back again – again he was lifting too heavy a load. The first day after the injury, he could not get out of bed, and thus did not practice. The day after, he felt even worse, and was much stiffer, but, even so, he decided to practice. In the first sun salutation, he was hardly able to bend forward. *Chaturanga* was hell, and he had to go down on his knees. But that day, he was 60 percent better. He kept on practicing, and by the third day, he was 80 percent better, and on the fourth, he was back to normal. These are fairly common stories that are told to testify to the healing powers of yoga.

Interestingly, in the same conversation in which Marvin brought up his back problems, there was also talk of the placebo effect, and how it actually works. This

can, perhaps, be to emphasize the body's self-healing. In the U.S. (and elsewhere), all side effects of legal drugs have to be listed by law, which means that anything that has happened to a person while taking the drugs has to be listed, no matter how rare and no matter the reason (which might be totally disconnected from the medicine). Marvin told us about a friend who is suffering from chronic pain. This friend discredited side effects, on the ground that we cannot know whether these things are really caused by the drugs – that/if they are in fact side effects – or whether they are caused by something completely different and unrelated to the drug. To Marvin, the interesting point to this story was that his friend discredited the presumed side effect, but not the (presumed) positive effects of drugs, which Marvin himself thought could just as easily be written off in the same way, i.e., something else could be the reason for the recovery, e.g., the body's ability to heal itself. This belief in the body is something Marvin shares, according to Womack (2010), with Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, who "... believed that the body has power to heal itself..." (Womack 2010: 179).<sup>155</sup> On the other hand: "Contemporary Western medicine has drifted away (...) from the idea that, under certain conditions, the body can heal itself" (Womack 2010: 179).

These two stories tell something of the view of Western medicine, and the belief in "traditional healing" and the body in general. What all these stories additionally indicate, especially the stories of John and Andreas, is that yoga is viewed in a certain instrumental light in Western health care institutions. Yoga can be used for restitution and healing in cases of both physical and mental health problems. This kind of instrumentality regarding the healing effects of yoga is also apparent in Marvin's story of backache, and to a lesser degree in Penelope's since she focuses on how yoga tunes the awareness of the body. This kind of instrumental thinking is also seen in the way many yoga studios advertise the practice, saying that yoga relieves backache, yoga is stress relief etc. Yoga is advertised as a cure-for-all. In line with Marvin's thoughts of placebo above, the positive effects are ascribed to yoga – as such – and not to exercise in general or as the side effect of other things in the life of the practitioners. Yoga works, and if at times it does not, the practitioner has done something to contradict the positive effect, or has done it the wrong way, like failed

---

<sup>155</sup> Zimmermann (1992) ascertains that "... Latin texts show that Āyurveda and Hippocratic medicine belong to the same Indo-European tradition" (Zimmermann 1992: 210).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Zande oracle readings (Evans-Pritchard 1976). If yoga works, it is the yoga working, and often, nothing else is considered to have contributed to the outcome. There are turtles all the way down!

There are also other ways to take control of the body, and how the body and its borders can be disciplined. At breakfast one morning we were talking about Varanasi and the holy river Ganges. Alf, having been there, and having swum in the river became the centre of our attention. This conversation ensued:

Anthony: “Were you all in? To your shoulders?” Alf: “No I jumped all in.” Anthony: “And you didn’t get sick or anything?” Alf: “No, nothing.” Martha – one of the new girls: “But it’s septic! A sewer is cleaner than that!” Alf: “It’s fear that’ll make you sick. I didn’t drink it. People do though, little children swim in it.” Martha: “But it’ll get in your orifices. It’s septic!” Kirsten: “It’d be strange to go to Varanasi and not do it though...” Alf: “Yeah, you have to do it!”

This conversation says much, both about the view of disease, the power of the mind (over body), and of the world-view and view of body of some of the students who are deep into their practices. Alf, who was authorized during his 2009 stay, asserts that swimming in the septic river will not make you sick as long as you are not afraid (of getting sick). And, although the rest of us were not all that convinced of how wise swimming in the river is, especially in Varanasi or downstream from that city, it holds a lure to many of the people coming to India. In the Hindu mythology, Ganges and Varanasi – the city where the three holy rivers, Ganges, Brahmaputra and Yamuna meet – hold a special place, and immersion in the water here frees the bather of all karma and secures *samadhi*. This is the place where most Hindus want to die as this gives them a free ticket to *moksha*. The conversation also attests to the different views of cleanliness and pollution that exists in Western medicine and the Hindu tradition. To Hindus there is no “cleaner” thing than the Ganges, and to a Western the Ganges – especially at this place where it is filled with left-overs of the funeral pyres – is more or less a sewer. Mind-set, letting go of fear, believing and surrendering to what the world has in store for you, all will influence your bodily. Being afraid and ego will both hold you back.



These stories, especially the two first also testifies to how, what has been seen as part of the alternative scene or alternative medicine is becoming more mainstream and more firmly part of many peoples' lives, also among medical professionals. All in all those who practice yoga seek an encompassing kind of health and wellness. The practice is only one part of a larger regime where food and spiritual-mental well-being are important, and as seen in the case of Alf's dip in the Ganges, surrendering and believing is understood to have a huge impact on health. These views of health and healing are very much tied to the commitment to yoga as a practice and philosophy. As Womack (2010) writes in her study on the anthropology of health and healing, medicine exists as part of cultural contexts, and even the biological paradigm is a folk model of health and illness. These models are subject to both political and sociocultural impact (Womack 2010). All forms of science, according to Womack (2010), are embedded in the cultural models in which they operate.

As such there is a "medical view" within the yoga community that draws heavily upon not only traditional Indian medicine, but also other interests that the individual students might have. This means that, though there are some common ideas of how to gain and preserve health, there are also individual conceptions as exemplified by preference in diet. Such confluences are much in line with both Bohm's theories (1995), and phenomenologically inclined theories of being-in-the-world (e.g., Desjarlais 1992). Ideas of how to preserve and gain health are heavily influenced by what kind of environment, culture, or world-views we inhabit, as well as experience. Womack (2010) illustrates how we patch together our life-worlds in an interesting way in the following story:

One of my professors had told me "superstition is someone else's religion." I held this opinion until a brief experiment with a traditional acupuncturist who connected my "illness" with my specialization as an anthropologist. She associated anthropology with old things and diagnosed my condition as having been caused by invading ancient spirits. She described her treatment as "closing [my] chakras" so that the "old spirits" could not continue to invade me. Since I had spent years in meditation trying to open my chakras, I was reluctant to pay someone to close them again. (Womack 2010: 204)

In the story she illustrates how we inhabit seemingly syncretistic, patchwork worlds, as the acupuncturist "diagnoses" her with anthropology and invading spirits and

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

prescribes closing the chakras, and it shows the alternative inklings of the anthropologist, who both meditates and experiments with acupuncture – albeit briefly. What is important here is that what can be perceived as patchwork for the observer is a “functioning whole” for the subject in question, and these life-worlds are based on the totality of the persons’ previous experience and knowledge. This is important to keep in mind when we try map why somebody starts and keeps practicing, and how they are influenced by the practice in general.

The “Western” and the “Indian” represents two ways of understanding yoga’s healing abilities. Western medical practitioners usually look to the physical and mental therapeutic/restitutive qualities of yoga. In the Indian tradition healing is an aspect of the practice in itself. Additionally there is the adept yogi, who through applying yoga or other remedies can cure others<sup>156</sup>. These two approaches now seem to be blending, as Indians are backing the traditional claims with findings in modern medical vocabulary and research, and Western researchers are actually doing research on yoga and the health benefits of the practice (e.g., Broad 2012b). Anthony, having a degree in chemistry, actually makes this link:

So I have my degree in chemistry and environmental science. So I was finishing up the university, and I wanted to get some business background, so I started working with a financial adviser, doing investments, like life insurance and stuff, so I was trying to find... I wanted to have a science background, and wanted to have some business application, and put the two together, and I started practicing yoga, and it all worked out well. Like the chemistry background has been amazing, and the business background has been too, for how to run a yoga business, how to teach yoga.

Me: I can kind of see the business background as very useful, but the chemistry is a bit harder to figure out...

Anthony: Yeah, the chemistry, the theory of chemistry I think... It’s very yoga. Like, I mean you get into the quantum avenue of chemistry it’s like where the scientists are like... don’t

---

<sup>156</sup> See “Autobiography of a Yogi” (Yogananda 1946), and also the story of how Krishnamacharya healed B.K.S. Iyengar. The latter represents the more applied approach, while the prior is might be said to be of a more magical/miraculous nature (although those familiar with the tradition might object to the term “miraculous” as they would rather put it down to the manipulation of energies etc.). As an aside, some even theorise that Jesus, who were to become the Christ, got to learn his healing skills and also got hold of his bag of other “magic” tricks while studying with yogic gurus in India those eight years that are lacking from his life story, as told in the Bible.

really know what is happening in between these atoms, and a lot of the time, the relation or how atoms, or how molecules interact with each other is the same like how people interact with each other and the chemistry really describes the scientific way of sort of breaking down, you know, equilibrium and balance principles, and things like that...

B.K.S. Iyengar has contributed to casting the yoga philosophy in more medical terms.<sup>157</sup> The two-foldedness is also due to the difference in the notion of health in the East and in the West. Where in the West you are either healthy or not, in the East there is rather a question of becoming healthier or less healthy. There is always more tuning that can be done. This notion of health is also becoming more common and popular in the West – and can, in Norway, partly be seen in the notion of graded sick leaves; even though you are not well, it does not mean you are so sick you cannot do anything. Additionally, there is the notion of seeing illness and wellness as part of a larger societal whole rather than just internal to the individual. (On the cultural embeddedness of illness and the question of “convertability” e.g., Lock 2002; Lakoff 2008)

#### Who is likely to seek cure in yoga?

... the chemistry of the body is complex. It cannot be reduced to a single variable or “cause.” The most important “cause” is lifestyle, which involves more variables than we could ever explain through laboratory research or clinical trials. (Womack 2010: 161)

In December 2009, Gemini, a magazine from the research centre SINTEF, wrote that a report from “Helseundersøkinga i Nord-Trøndelag” shows that people with higher education are more likely to try alternative treatment, than people with less education. This is counter to earlier ideas that held that educated people were less prone to believe in “superstition”. The reason for this “new” tendency might of course be that they can afford the trials and errors of different “therapies”, that they are more widely read (and thus more exposed to “new” input), or that they are part of the avant-garde when it comes to cultural impulses. They might be more open-minded to new impulses (as opposed to old fashioned superstitions). As also Meredith B. McGuire (1993) notes, the combination of health and spirituality is prevalent among those

---

<sup>157</sup> See “Light on Yoga” (Iyengar 1994), and for another contribution “Anatomy of Hatha-Yoga” (Coulter 2001).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

people “... that conventional wisdom suggest would be secularized and likely to use only rational approaches to healing and health maintenance” (McGuire 1993: 145). She goes on to enumerate education, economic standing, urban or suburban dwelling, and middle- or upper-middle-class belonging. The relatively high education level was also something that many touched upon when talking about who was likely to practice yoga and travel to India – and relative affluence.

Jennifer shares this idea of yoga as a form of therapy. Though, to her it is not necessarily therapy for a definite ailment, but rather for her whole life:

People say like, therapists are the ones who need the therapy the most, which is of course funny for me to say so since I plan to be a therapist, but I think it’s possible people in their... Like to me, yoga practice is form of therapy, in that it’s all a form of wanting to make one’s own experience of life more peaceful, more joyous, more connected, it’s wanting to help oneself and hopefully with some understanding that that will make you more able to spread goodness to other people.

The kind of therapy Jennifer is talking of here, is more of a life altering therapy or practice that changes the way life is experienced and valued (as was also seen in the aftermaths of John’s and Andreas’ crises). On a more mundane note, Nevrin says that:

Beneficial effects due to yoga are often claimed to range from increased relaxation to enhanced muscular strength, from cardiorespiratory fitness to changed body composition, all of which will typically have considerable consequences for anxiety levels, stress resistance, and so on. (Nevrin 2008: 125)

The eagerness with which so-called alternative treatments are embraced might not only connote open-mindedness towards the new, but also show a lack of faith in modern medicine. As has been pointed out, alienation seems prevalent in the modern, or post-modern, world. The critique of modern medicine has often concerned the objectification of the body, and the disease. Womack suggests “... that the metaphor of the human body as a machine has found its way into the practice of Western medicine, in which the body is treated as a collection of parts” (2010: 19). The malfunctioning body has been in the limelight, and the bits and parts in or on the body that are sick or damaged have tended to get all the attention. The body has to some

degree been handled on mechanistic, and later technologic, terms. Further Womack claims:

A basic flaw in both science and Western biomedicine is the assumption that complex variables, such as health, can be reduced to a single variable. The quest for a “magic bullet” to certain complex variables takes on a moralistic value that short-changes medical researchers, health care providers, and the public as a whole. Issues involved in maintaining health and promoting healing cannot be reduced to a single variable. In addition, it is a well-known tenet of science that statistics, however accurate, cannot predict individual cases. (Womack 2010: 180)

The social environment of the individual might be in focus where mental illness is in question, but still this is often regarded as somewhat “less real” than what can be felt, seen, and cut out of the material body.<sup>158</sup> The question of harmony or alignment as Womack (2010) puts it also requires that we should not make war on the body, as the vocabulary of Western medicine seems to suggest (Haraway 1993), but rather listen to the body, be in dialog with it, and so on, which implicitly still point to a certain division between two entities, though. As such this goes hand in hand with the spiritual revolution (Heelas and Woodhead 2005) where alienated people search for new meaning in a world they perceive as cold and distanced, if not hostile. People are longing to be seen, and yoga and (other) alternative therapies and treatments often propose a more holistic view of the person – or on the flip-side; the individual. The “individual” might, though a bit paradoxically, be another crucial phenomenon/idea/part of this turn. In modern medicine the body is not (only?) individualized, but rather (also?) universalized, as it for instance tends to ignore regional adaptations to environmental conditions (Womack 2010: 182). All bodies are basically the same, and should conform to the same blueprint. Bodies that do not fit the blueprint are sick or damaged and need to be “repaired”. The body is as such either healthy or sick, and there’s no in-between. George, as a trained nurse, puts it like this:

---

<sup>158</sup> The notion of “psycho-somatic” ailments is itself “proof” that these kinds of problems are seen as less real than purely somatic problems. “It is all in your head.” Since there is nothing physically wrong with you, you are making yourself sick by thinking/imagining you are ill. Wouldn’t it be more correct to say that all ailments to some degree are “psycho-somatic”/“somato-psychic” since mental problems (like stress) often influence the body (physically), and physical ailments mostly influence mentality/mental health?

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

[In Western medicine you are] either healthy or not healthy, you need an operation or you don't need an operation. With yoga or massage or this type of lifestyle you look at... I mean, wellness... Like you can become more healthy, at any stage. More and more healthy. And take care of yourself.

Womack's description supports George's notion:

One way in which Asian energy models differ from Western biomedicine is that the Asian emphasis is on promoting health and preventing illness, rather than waiting for illness to occur. In addition, Asian models of healing are aimed at promoting harmony in the individual's lifestyle and physical space. (Womack 2010: 199)

In Western medicine, the very personal/individual experience of illness is cut into shape to fit the accepted-as-universal-views of the medical practitioners. This seems to have changed a bit in later years, however, as there has been an increased focus on dieting and exercising for health benefits, and partly to prevent future illness. Many alternative treatments take as their starting-point exactly these kinds of personal experiences that practitioners of Western medicine tend to overlook (especially if they do not conform to any known pattern). I say that the idea of “individuality” is a bit paradoxical in these regards, since this idea to a large degree has sprung from the same source as Western medicine, and that the (often) eastern traditions (or perhaps “indigenous traditions”) that are at the roots of many of the alternative medical treatments, put less weight on the “individual” (person/body) as such, but rather on the social body, and the socially embedded person/body (e.g., Desjarlais 1992). Persons and bodies are treated as in worlds of social ties and embeddedness, rather than as “organically” isolated units.<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> There is something that ought to be pursued elsewhere in the range between the “Individual” and the “personal”. Instead of the “individual” body there is the question of the “personal” body and its ties to the surroundings. These ties would be unique for every person and/or every single body, but cannot be separated (individualized) from the surroundings. It is interesting because the “individual” and “individuality” are key notions in much of these practices – which of course might be because of a lack of correspondence in the “meanings” of the notions in the social sciences and in popular use. If the “individual” is the most important part of the Western Universe (a bit crookedly put) as Durkheim claims (according to Lindholm: “... the fragmentation of the cosmically ratified premodern universe leaves only the individual as the ultimate object of worship” (Lindholm 2008: 69)) – it is paradoxical that individuality is sought in traditions where the (social) person has been more important – although the “individual” (in a more Western sense) has had its field among ascetics and other lone wolfs.

Womack (2010) claims that an important difference between Western biomedicine and the Asian models of health and healing is that while the first is primarily treating particular illnesses, the latter considers the context the illness occurs within. Within the Asian models health and illness are socially embedded, and seen as resulting from the individual's relationship to family, local group, environment and the universe – universe in this context encompassing social, physical and spiritual universes. Thus, the health or illness of the individual is a matter of alignment, balance and harmony between the individual, his or her social and relationships and the whole universe. (Womack 2010. See also Desjarlais 1992) Yoga practitioners, though usually raised within Western models of health and healing also delve into and include Asian models – or more particularly Indian models, though not exclusively, as they often employ acupuncture, Reiki, homeopathy and other models as well – in their remedial exploits. Their views of health, healing and illness, are negotiated and created against their previous experiences with all these models. Asian models of thinking health and healing have an appeal since they take stock of the whole person, rather than just the physical body as such. Illness and health are thus given wider meaning in such contexts.

### Yoga in a lifestyle tuned to health and body

Pleasure + Nutrition + Exercise + Chemical Processes in the Brain and Body = Health.  
(Womack 2010: 163)

As established the practitioners personalize their practices to fit previous experience, and to their needs and expectations. Often very syncretistic approaches, people pick and choose from a number of traditions and remedies, not too concerned about the “actual” compatibility of the ideas and practices. Slimming and fitness are often tied to health issues today, and two of the more instrumental reasons to do Ashtanga yoga, as are the wish for a better looking body (which is of course related) as Jennifer admits to when she says:

To the extent that I've been exposed to people who do Iyengar and people who do Ashtanga, the Ashtanga bodies are closer to what is conventionally considered attractive in the Western world. And that says something, and might be linked to egotism. Like for me, part of the

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

reason why I would be drawn to do Ashtanga every day, is [that] I like how it makes my body look. It doesn't make my body feel very different in any way I can perceive, but I like how it looks, and that is a purely superficial ego based way to do something.

This focus on the “self” might also grip on to the self-centeredness and egotism that some of my informants/friends pointed to among the practitioners. Building a practice mainly around your own needs can foster these kinds of notions. Martin touches upon this topic when he says:

This hotshot I met in Goa last year, this girl who could do anything, who had been practicing two years, and she's covered in tattoos. Really impressive, she's got like angel wings on her back, and you know... But, I mean, unfortunately I think it is still a lot of body obsession and body perfection about it. I'm glad that I'm slim and toned and everything else, and I like to have a tanned skin, and I like to look well, you know, the tattoo I like it, I think it suits me, you know, I'm vain. To a certain extent. I mean, not so much anymore, but still I am. I mean, I do wonder how narcissistic the whole practice is. I think it is.

This might also be part of a larger trend in (post-) modern society, where youth, health and beauty have become prime assets and driving ideals. It might be claimed that these ideals are part of rather self-centred, self-realization processes. “Finding one's self” or “getting in touch with one's body” are leitmotifs in the stories of many yoga practitioners. In contrasting yoga with the dancing she used to do, Jennifer come onto these topics:

For me like dance was so external, like my heart was in it, but it was always someone else's visions telling your body what to do. Not like communicate with your soul, but do what I'm saying on this beat, in sync with these other bodies. And so I think that that fostered a detachment between me and my own physical being, and I think, I don't know that I knew it at the time, but yoga was building the bricks to reconnect to that communication. And sort of synchronicity between my thoughts and my body, and physical health and emotional health, and...

In contrasting dance and yoga, Jennifer highlights some important aspects of yoga in regards to health. Where dance is aimed at pleasing an audience and conforming to the idea of a choreographer as well as the music played, it is externally oriented. Yoga on the other hand is turned inwards, and instead of listening to the beat, getting in



tune with your own body is the goal. As Jennifer says, this is the foundation for better living and better health. “Reconnecting” is itself a key term, since it underlines the idea of regaining something that has been lost. Some crucial originality or authentic state of being connected to the body, and of the synchronicity of mind and body, that is basic to physical and emotional health. Mind and body are reconnected, and the dualism is erased. Jennifer elucidates:

Biggest benefit: I think health. I think not meaning how my organs work or heart condition, more emotional health with relationship to my body and that... there's been a reconnection, I think, between mind and body, identity of the self, whether it's pain or sadness or whatever and the body, and a much greater respect and appreciation of the workings of the body. And I think a lot of that was like the dance creating separation, and the yoga just making me the relevant party in the experience. I think it has really invited internal communication, sort of feedback systems, that I had, if they existed before, I had sort of like cut them off. And that's me as like everything in life. Like so crucial to living a happy functional life. I think Ashtanga makes me physically stronger, and that helps me to be like; “oh, look I can a strong person, and maybe live that way more so.”

Dance, though physical, cut her off from herself, as “the show must go on” even if there are pain and minor injuries. The signs of the body were disregarded. Through yoga, Jennifer has gotten back in touch with the feedback system of her body. She has gained greater respect for and appreciation for the workings of the body as she puts it. This reattachment extends beyond aches and pains to her emotions.

The unity and connectedness of body and mind is coveted as both an original/authentic and a healthy state. To recreate this connection and “getting in touch with oneself” is seen as therapeutic. These insights are something that has been lost in the West, and Eastern traditions, for instance in yoga, can be a source for regaining it, according to many practitioners. To heal something properly, it is not enough to remove the symptoms, as there is also a need to heal the whole person and the person's surroundings.

There has been a strong orientation towards a privatization and individualization of the body and personal life in what Shilling (1993) and others call high modernity, or post modernity. As many people feel, according to Shilling (1993), that the grand

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

narratives of religion and science have lost their ability to explain the workings of the world and life in general adequately, these people have turned inwards in search for meaning and for answers to the great questions of life, as is also at the heart of Heelas’ (2008) notion of “spirituality of life”. The self has become an important project for most people of high modernity. In Shillings words:

For those who have lost their faith in religious authorities and grand political narratives, and are no longer provided with a clear world view or self-identity by these trans-personal meaning structures, at least the body initially appears to provide a firm foundation on which to reconstruct a reliable sense of self in the modern world. Indeed, the increasingly reflexive ways in which people are relating to their bodies can be seen as one of the defining features of high modernity. Furthermore, it is the exterior territories, or surfaces, of the body that symbolize the self at a time when unprecedented value is placed on the youthful, trim and sensual body. (Shilling 1993: 3)

In this context, and in searching for meaning, yoga, or any adaptation thereof, and other physical practices have become widely popular, as the body has been perceived as the only solid foundation of the self. Additionally the body has been viewed as an unfinished entity that has been turned into a project and become a part of establishing and working the individual sense of self and identity. The body is a process of becoming, as Shilling (1993) puts it. Yoga practitioners, though much a part of the increased reflexivity of body, are somewhat at odds with these “defining features of high modernity” as they strive to go beyond the surfaces of the body. Though not imperceptive of appearance, most yogis emphasize deeper connections to body.

According to Baudrillard (2005) the body has become an *object of salvation* that has taken over that “... moral and ideological function of the soul” (Baudrillard 2005: 277). The body has been rediscovered in modern consumer society, and great efforts are being made to convince people of their bodies. The body is omnipresent

... in advertising, fashion, and mass culture; the hygienic, dietetic, therapeutic cult which surrounds it, the obsession with youth, elegance, virility/femininity, treatments and regimes, and the sacrificial practices attaching to it all bear witness... (Baudrillard 2005: 277)

to the obsession with body today. The body has become both capital and consumer object, according to Baudrillard (2005). We have to take responsibility towards our bodies, and failing to do so we will be punished by it (Baudrillard 2005). We are by way of individualization and privatization becoming responsible for our own health, well-being and happiness, and the body has become a very central element in achieving this. We have to (re-) inhabit our bodies, and there is, what Baudrillard (2005) calls, a “managed reappropriation” of it. The body is as such being invested in – both economically and physically. And like in economic investments, we expect returns from these investments, in the form of social status, and beauty and the erotic comes to primarily have a sign-value (Baudrillard 2005; Fraser & Greco 2005). “In other words, one manages one’s body; one handles it as one might handle an inheritance; one manipulates it as one of the many *signifiers of social status*.” (Baudrillard 2005: 279)

The fit, healthy and beautiful body as such becomes a sign that one is among the chosen. It’s a “... sign of election and salvation...” (Baudrillard 2005: 280), and body in the correct form becomes physical capital (Bourdieu 1978). Yoga is for many an essential part in their projects of self and body. Yoga can be seen as a part of this investment in the body. It can be a way of toning and tuning the body, getting physically in shape, and becoming healthy. The yoga body becomes a prime asset and physical capital even outside the yoga community. The physical aspects of yoga, also as an investment in the body, can be interpreted as part of the current fitness culture of which Roberta Sassatelli writes about in her works “Fitness Culture” (2010) and “The Commercialization of Discipline: Keep-Fit Culture and its Values” (2000 & 2005).

Sassatelli (2000), though, claims that the body represents a somewhat deeper commitment in “fitness” or the keep-fit culture, than Baudrillard’s (2005) skin deep narcissistic appropriation. The fit body is an abstract target as it is compatible with different body shapes, and what actually “fit” entails depends to some degree on gender and on personal desires.<sup>160</sup> She also explores how and to what degree physical

---

<sup>160</sup> “Gender” is something that could have been included as a perspective in this thesis. It has for instance been claimed that Ashtanga as a physical practice is most suitable for young and healthy boys. Worldwide there also seem to be more female practitioners than males. Though some point out the difference between the genders, as in “boys are stronger” while “girls are more flexible” and thus, have different challenges in the practice, most emphasize that we all have our different strengths,

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

fitness can be a way of altering the appearance of one’s body and by way of that, altering one’s personality. As consumers the clients of gyms choose their personal training programs, and the gyms present themselves as satisfying everybody’s needs. Physical activity is portrayed as satisfying and pleasant, rather than strenuous, and the gym is a place for regeneration and improving the body. (Sassatelli 2000) Fitness focuses on functionality more than appearance, and

... is an umbrella term for the set of deep (as opposed to cosmetic) physical characteristics like energy, elasticity and strength which define a fit body and also a series of exercise techniques aimed at obtaining a body with these characteristics. (Sassatelli 2000: 400)

Appearance is not irrelevant, though, as certain body shapes express fitness. Aesthetically, fitness is the toned, slim and hard body, with well-defined and long-lined muscles (Sassatelli 2000), which could well be a description of the Ashtanga yoga body.

Going to a gym or a fitness centre is a way of disciplining oneself and one’s body, and the fit body thus becomes a sign of self-control. Appearance becomes a sign of personal commitment and ability to discipline oneself. Muscle is “docile and functional”, while fat is a “... most obvious sign of a lack of physical discipline” (Sassatelli 2000: 401). According to fitness enthusiasts, exercise goes beyond self-presentation and cosmetics, and belongs to the subject and his or her feelings. Exercising is a “natural” way of altering the body as opposed to surgery, and to a certain degree make-up, which makes the subjects “fake”. “... improving yourself, becoming ‘truly different’, means ‘doing something physical in a natural way, with your flesh, with your own possibilities...’” (Sassatelli 2000: 405). This self-control also extends to health issues, as being fat and unfit is *unhealthy*. There is for instance much talk about “life-style diseases”. Exercising is a legitimate way of transforming oneself as it is authentic and one has endured. As Sassatelli puts it: “The autonomous resolute subject demonstrates his/her moral fibre by self-control, starting with the body.” (Sassatelli 2000: 408)

---

weaknesses and thus, challenges in the practice. The point is pushing against these personal limitations and expanding one’s own horizon, independent of sex and gender. Also in the Shala, I would estimate that there are approximately the same number of girls and boys. Thus, I rather focus on the person “beyond” gender and the “universality” of the practice.

In a world where control is increasingly difficult to uphold, the body is perceived to be the only stable entity and place for control (Sassatelli 2000; Shilling 1993) or a place to show superiority in an age marked by competition (Sassatelli 2000). The gym encourages a certain notion of the body and of what is natural, and thus also a way of gaining the desired control. In the modern world taking care for oneself and one's body has become a moral obligation. As health to some degree has been privatized,<sup>161</sup> fitness and exposing a fit body is taken as a sign that one is taking the moral obligation seriously, as certain body shapes are deemed to be the best indicators of self-control. Thus looking and being fit, and being healthy have to some degree become intermingled in the public view of body. Being healthy now means looking natural and looking good, and this can be obtained through the consumption of the right activities at fitness centres and gyms, where the clients...

... appeal to the idea that by working out with weights, step and exercise bicycles they can discover their own bodies and its naturalness, thereby becoming better, stronger selves. (Sassatelli 2000: 409)

In relation to the physical aspects of the yoga practice and the relationship to the body, there are similarities between the yoga student's and the fitness enthusiast's attitude. Yoga practice is undertaken to become a better and stronger self, and the body can in yoga as in exercising in a gym be a sign of commitment and strong, not only muscles, but also moral fibre. The betterment of body and self becomes a firm foundation in an uncertain world characterised by lack of control, as characterised by Shilling (1993). Physical practice undertaken as a means to change the body also becomes a source for changing the self. In yoga, the body is not an end in itself though. A fit, toned and strong body is rather a fortunate by-product of the rigorous physical practice, which is rather designed to transcend the limitations of the physical body, and those who are in it for "the looks" are seen as lesser yogis. Shilling (1993),

---

<sup>161</sup> At the opposite end of the spectrum though, the individual's health has also become a public responsibility, and each person has to some degree become morally obliged to take care of own health, not only for one's own sake, but also for the sake of "society". Health problems are expensive, not only for the sick individual, but for society at large. That some counties in Norway now prescribe exercise to unhealthy patients is a sign of this societal responsibility. Health is, thus, both privatized, and made public.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

by the way of Bauman (1992), argues that it is a lack of religious alternative that has made “modern man” turn to the body, and he writes:

Bauman suggest that the relative absence of religious survival strategies in the face of death is now compensated for by a policy of *self-care* (Bauman, 1992(...): 18). This focuses not on the ultimate mortality of the body, but on how its specific and localized limits can be overcome through what I have referred to earlier as body projects. A major feature of this survival strategy is the pervasive concern with issues relating to health and body. (Shilling 1993: 191)

Though this might be part of an explanation, I will argue that in yoga, the physical exercise and its moral implications are wrapped in a metaphysical context and given spiritual significance. Yoga, as an introspective and reflexive practice that encourages awareness of body and self, is based on “ancient truths” of the Hindu civilization. Though this is, as I have shown, controversial and debateable (as can also be seen in a recent exchange in the aftermath of an Open Magazine article by Meera Nanda (Nanda 2011a, 2011b; Venkataraman 2011a, 2011b)<sup>162</sup>, the yoga philosophy is seen as authentic, true, and tested, and as such it is – by the practitioners – seen as a powerful tool in the search for authentic meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. Yoga, for these students, represents the roots of human knowledge, and is a science/religion (depending on the inclinations of the speaker) geared towards “knowing thyself” – and ultimately dissolving this same self, though this is not equally emphasized by all practitioners. Yoga can be said to combine a “religious survival strategy” with a “policy of self-care” (Bauman 1992) or a body project (Shilling 1993). The body project is in yoga given a spiritual dimension, and yoga as a body project becomes an “enchanted” project, which is given significance beyond “just the physical”.

As exercising in a gym can make people rediscover their bodies (Sassatelli 2000), it can be argued that “enlightenment” in Ashtanga yoga has become embodied as a part of lifestyles tuned to health and body. The practitioner is enlightened to his or her own physicality and body. Enlightenment has for the physically inclined practitioners become situated within the flesh, and this actually entails a yoking of mind and body,

---

<sup>162</sup> See Chapter 3.

as the mind comes to be understood as embodied, or the body “enminded” (Ingold 2000) if you will. There is a realisation of being body in the world.

Yoga student can come to realize that they have bodies, and realize themselves *as* bodies, that is; that they *are* bodies. As Jennifer says, there is a reconnection between the body and the mind. They are further realizing the potential their bodies and they as bodies have. The yoga practice, and through it the body, comes to have *meaning* for the students. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

The sensible configuration of an object or a gesture, which the criticism of the constancy hypothesis brings before our eyes, is not grasped in some inexpressible coincidence, it “is understood” through a sort of act of appropriation which we all experience when we say that we have “found” the rabbit in the foliage of a puzzle, or that we have “caught” a slight gesture. Once the prejudice of sensation has been banished, a face, a signature, a form of behavior cease to be mere “visual data” whose psychological meaning is to be sought in our inner experience, and the mental life of others becomes an immediate object, a whole charged with immanent meaning. (Merleau-Ponty 2007: 144)

Socialized into the reality of the yoga philosophy and through the physical practice it ceases to be “mere visual data”. As the practitioners get to know the philosophy surrounding the physical practice, they also relate their experience of this practice to the philosophy and learn to recognize the bodily changes that are parallel to the philosophical ideals. Or rather, they are enabled to relate their experience to the philosophy and make sense of their physical changes and reactions in relation to the philosophy, as well as look for and feel their bodies against this background. Physical experience lends credibility to the philosophical ideas, and through the philosophy the students are helped both to legitimize their practice and make sense of what happens on the yoga mat. The physical changes that happen to one’s own body might be a motivation for practicing, but also *prove* the strength of the practice, and thus the philosophy that prescribes it. Through the yoga practice the body gets in shape, and thus the fit body becomes proof of the truth of yoga’s power to change each person for the better. When this is realised, the change has already occurred according to Bohm (1995). The strong, youthful and fit body can become a sign of a dedicated practice, and a dedication to the (soteriological) ideal of the yoga philosophy. At the same time the modern day occupation with health and fitness lends the yoga body and

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

the practice of yoga significance *beyond* the yoga community, as the body obtained through the practice is recognisable as “valuable”, fit and healthy by non-practitioners, as well as practitioners. The societal discourse on health and exercise likewise has an impact on the practice and the meaning practitioners unfold from it. The yoga body is, thus, *unfolded* into the surrounding society, but societal notions of health, well-being and being fit, are also *enfolded* as significant factors in the practice and the yoga body.

In the following chapter, I will broaden the scope of returning to a healthy or whole state of being and look at the religio-spiritual dimensions of the yoga practice.



## 8: The spiritual body: Gods, gurus and guidance

*The expressive self is undergoing the suffocating squeeze. (Heelas 2008: 2)*

Modernity turns out to be enigmatic at its core, and there seems no way in which this enigma can be “overcome.” We are left with questions where once there appeared to be answers, and I shall argue subsequently that it is not only philosophers who realise this. A general awareness of the phenomenon filters into anxieties which press in on everyone. (Giddens 1990: 49)

But spirituality in America has become “easy,” and we are becoming dumbed down. It is not wrong to work hard and strive to understand something difficult and subtle, and then achieve an inner satisfaction that is the result of hard work, persistence and dedication -- let’s not sweep that under the table. To live a life of self-examination is not always an easy thing. But that does not mean that it is not joyous, or have its own rewards, for it can be both of those things. (Stern 2012)

Stern (2012) here takes us to the heart of the matter. “Spirituality”, like “religion”, and probably because it is associated with it, are loaded and debated terms in this day and age, and “admitting” to adhere to a religion or “being spiritual” might land you in tricky discussions where you have to defend yourself. Dumbing spirituality down might as such be a way to make it less “dangerous”. Even so, the world is also being “reenchanted” (Csordas 2009), and people turn to “spiritual solutions” in seeking to alleviate the anxieties that are emerging with the questions Giddens (1990) claims that modernity is forcing upon us. As with issues concerning personal health, it has also been claimed that “spirituality” has become a personal quest that is replacing “religion” which is more collectively oriented and tied to “external” entities (Heelas 2008). Many of my informants were trying to get to grips with the slippery matter of spirituality, as for instance did Damien, when I asked him what it is for him:

That’s another loaded question. Because we all have spirits, we all... I’m a bit of a unified theorist, you know, that we’re all basically one consciousness moving at different vibrations. And so that there is no difference between our spirits, you know. But what is spiritual tourism to me? That’s a... I don’t know... I don’t get any sort of pride or any sort of ego boost from seeing a temple or taking pictures of it. I don’t know, I appreciate it aesthetically and I know it’s something very profound for other people, but I don’t feel like it’s making me like more

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

spiritual or a deeper person. It’s tough. Spirit to me is... how you deal with diversity. How you overcome the challenges in life. I don’t really think of it in a religious sense.

Still God, gurus and notions of guidance are common in the life-stories of many the people I have met in yoga circles. The yoga texts and philosophy abound with such references, and yoga is by most ultimately dubbed as a spiritual – rather than religious – practice. These core images of the practice and their relevance in Western society today is what I will turn to in the following. Most of my informants come from Judeo-Christian backgrounds and traditions, although as we shall see a few hesitate to call themselves Christian, Jewish, or even religious. Most of the Western practitioners come from such religio-cultural settings, while for instance the Japanese students are mainly from Buddhist and Shinto backgrounds.<sup>163</sup> As previously mentioned; yoga seems to offer vital answers, to some people, to the questions that has resurfaced with the kind of existential doubt that has emerged in the Western world, which Giddens (1990) seems to be alluding to. Yoga, in its plasticity, can cater to a wide range of personal needs. The philosophy and the focus on personal practice fit well with ideas of individuality, spiritual longing, and the “modern” concern with health and anti-materialism. At the same time its associations with “religion”, needs to be resolved in the personal practice of each student. As we will see, there are many ways of resolving this, and it depends on each student’s notion of “God”, “religion” and not least “yoga”. The need to resolve the connections between these “entities” stems from, among other things, yoga’s origins within Hinduism and the ambiguous place of religion in Western society today, which I touched upon in Chapter 3.

In the following part I deal with spiritual aspects and imagery in (modern day) personal yoga practices, and I will show how the relationship between physical exercise, societal definitions of the practice, and personal spiritual inclinations – or the lack there of – idiosyncratically can be negotiated in relation to personal experience. When dealing with “spirituality” we also have to look into interpretations and modern day notions of religion and spirituality. As we will see, “spirituality” and “religion” are terms and phenomena that yoga practitioners are striving to make sense

---

<sup>163</sup> I assume that a stronger emphasize on Asian – but still non-Indian – students might have given a different picture of both motivations for practicing and of the religio-spiritual focus of the practice. Such a comparative perspective does regrettably not fall within the scope of this project though, as I have not collected much such comparative data.

of, both how they can relate to their own life and not least what they might mean in the context of their yoga practice.

### Gurus and Guidance

Part of the attempt at making sense of yoga practice in particular, and life in general, is among these yoga practitioners expressed in the quest for a guru, or at least a teacher and guidance – both in the practice and in life (especially for those who have delved the deepest into the practice). As the geographical and ideological source of Pattabhi Jois' Ashtanga yoga, KPJAYI and Mysore are important locations in this search for guidance. Students practicing with teachers who have made regular trips to Mysore often are more aware of how the teaching is done, and thus has more realistic expectations. Even so the people coming to practice in the Shala have different expectations and needs when coming there, but what most has in common is an idea that the stay at the Shala will “deepen” their practice, their connection to it, and the “lineage”.

Astrid and Marita both feel that they have gained new security in their practice by coming here. Having not been totally at ease at their home studio, and having found the teachers there too impersonal and aloof, coming to Mysore to practice at the Shala has given a renewed belief in the Ashtanga practice. Astrid is practicing with Saraswathi and Marita with Sharath, and they both feel seen by their respective teachers, and that they get the recognition they need in the practice. They have established contact with their respective teachers and feel that they can go home to practicing both at their regular studio and at home alone with the insight that they have found “their (thing in the) practice”. Marita and Astrid, who feel they have not had such a strong connection back home, might more easily find their place in the Shala. Eirin and Amanda felt that they needed to be in Mysore a few weeks before this kind of contact was established. They felt invisible to Saraswathi, who teaches both. As they now have established contact with her, they, in hindsight, say that they did not *feel* seen, but have realized that even if she is not hands-on all the time, she saw them. Amanda recounted how Saraswathi is at the far end of the room, but when Amanda gets to the points in the series where she requires help, suddenly she is there in front of her. This is common experience among the students, and many claim that

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Sharath and Saraswathi consciously avoid being too attentive in the beginning to both observe, and partly test, newcomers. If a new student demands too much attention, Sharath and Saraswathi’s inattentiveness might stretch even longer, until the student gives in. Whether true or not, it is a rather common interpretation among the students that this teaches humility, “contentment” and that the students learn to focus on one’s own practice.

According to their experience, needs and expectations the students project qualities and character upon Sharath and Saraswathi. The teachers are mirrored in the students’ own mind-sets. They mirror the students’ expectations and are given moods and motivations accordingly. In my own experience, I have always felt seen and welcome in the main Shala, and I have not been among the most attention-seeking students. Returning in January 2011, one and a half year after I left in September 2009, both Sharath and Saraswathi recognized me, and seemed happy to see me, even though I have not been among the students who have had the most contact with them, neither in nor outside class. Perhaps, the fact that I have not really had a teacher back home for the last couple of years, has helped establish and nourish this experience for me. Being one among hundreds of students, and having practiced with Sharath only a couple of months, their recognition of me made me feel very welcome, and I can empathize with those who feel that they have been deprived of this experience.

### Surrendering

A prevalent way of talking about surrendering, though, seems to be to do something with “no expectations”, and to just give in to the practice, India and the teachers. Students strive to shed their expectations and to let themselves be taken wherever they are “supposed” to go. This shedding of expectations does not necessarily happen unquestioningly or unreflectively, but most try not to force their will too much.

To surrender is one of the main lessons Andreas has learned through yoga. He conceptualises this with the notion of the “empty cup”. If you come with an empty cup, you are free to receive whatever knowledge you are presented with, whereas if your cup is already full – with expectations, prejudices, knowledge etc. – you become very limited in what you are open to take in. The empty cup makes it easier to accept

whatever comes your way, although Andreas also questions how wise this is. If you just accept everything, does that make you stupid and too easily led? The approach of not questioning and just accepting has, on the one hand, made Andreas wonder if he is stupid and an easy target, but, on the other hand, he has had no problems of any kind, neither with the practice in the Shala nor with India, in general. He has found this very suggestive.

Jennifer more clearly shows the critical attitude that Andreas is questioning himself for lacking. She shows what might be called “unwillingness” to surrender completely, but in comparing Ashtanga to religion she also says that most ashtangis show a lot of faith in the practice:

It goes back to how much is it really telling you, connect with you, that’s a big leap of faith, that by letting someone else dictate all your activities you will eventually become more connected with yourself. I don’t know how comfortable I would be in taking... I mean, I really hope that in any pursuit in my life, if someone outside of me is telling me to do something, and I a 100% feel within myself I should not be doing that thing, that I won’t. Whether it’s Sharath or my mother. Or whatever. So... it’s an interesting thing, and I really do respect that I’m early into the experience and that... someone said to me today “discipline is freedom”. And however they might have meant that, I don’t have a clear and literal understanding of that, that I could outline for myself. And maybe at some poi... but at some point I couldn’t do poses that now I can do, so maybe at some point that connection will be understood by me. But right now I think there’s... I mean, I’m doing it, I’m here in India, I’ve been for months, I will do the practice every day, when I leave. I just went to a bike shop, Sharath sent me to, and got a thin tube that I’m now to put up my nostril and pull out through my mouth, so I’m showing a lot of willingness here! Hehehe

As a yoga practitioner you are asked to believe in the practice and in the guru, and act accordingly. And although she is willing to try a lot of things (like showing a rubber tube up her nose and pull it out through her mouth in order to clean her *nadis* (sinuses)), Jennifer takes a critical attitude and claims the right to not do something she does not feel like doing. Jennifer is very adamant in always being “critical” and reflecting on everything. So while many will underline the need to follow the guru regardless of what you are told to do, as he is the only one to have the (secret/mystic) knowledge, Jennifer hopes that she will always question the authorities. She sees a paradox in the notion of finding yourself through the submission to others. How will

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

you connect to your (true) self, if you are dictated by others? As she says, the “Yoga Sutras” and also Pattabhi Jois’ “Yoga Mala” (2002) are rather detailed in describing how the yogi’s and yoga practitioner’s life should be. On the other hand she is clear that she is as of yet very early into the Ashtanga yoga experience, and she is also already willing to go quite far in her trust of Sharath as teacher, and she does consent that the practice in India under Sharath guidance has taken her beyond where she used to be.

There might be something in the way of the guru here that does not necessarily compute very well with Western notions of teaching, learning and critical thinking. In schools in the West, we are continually taught that we are not to take anything for granted, that we should be critical of everything we learn<sup>164</sup> and that we should question it and not take it for granted. In the Indian guru tradition, on the other hand, it is the guru who possesses and guards the secret knowledge, and it is the guru who is in the position to share the knowledge, as he sees fit, to receivers who have, in some way or another, proved themselves to be worthy of this knowledge. The pupil/student/receiver is at the guru’s mercy and must have faith in the guru that he/she will be guided in the right direction. Additionally, the knowledge might be conveyed and transmitted in indirect ways, in order to be felt, experienced and bodily understood, rather than purely and rationally accepted through the process of thinking and rationalizing.

Gurus and guidance are sought when one’s own experience does not dissolve the challenges that are encountered in life. One’s own experience and expectations are also important factors in determining how these encounters with these helpers will end. That being said, the role of the Guru as a dispeller of confusion, and as an insurance against going astray on the path of spiritual growth, is central in the yoga literature. The Guru-disciple relationship is also somewhat romanticised, and these aspects might be partial in making aspiring yogis seek out “high ranking” and famous yoga teachers worldwide.

---

<sup>164</sup> It could, of course, be questioned if this takes place, and even if it is still an ideal, but at least the Western scientific tradition has been heavily influenced by critical and questioning thinking. The notion of falsification is important here.

### 8.1 Gods, spirituality and “embodied enlightenment”?

During my interviews in Mysore, I always came to a point where I asked: “Do you believe in God?” There were several reasons why I felt asking this question was interesting and important. Some reasons came from my own views and interpretations of yoga and some from thoughts that have crept up on me because of other peoples’ statements regarding their practice. The topic have come up in discussions, talks or just statements from other practitioners and have often evolved around whether yoga is a religion or not, or if it has to be a spiritual practice. A more direct reason for including the question was a statement made by Sharath during one of the weekly conferences. At the Sunday conference February 6<sup>th</sup> 2011 a student asked Sharath if it is necessary to believe in God in order to practice Ashtanga yoga, to which Sharath answered: “Yes! Why would you be here if you didn’t?” He continued: “You have to believe in God, but which one you decide. God is one.” He continued by telling a joke about a Muslim, a Christian and a Hindu falling into a well. Neither of them could swim and there was a lot of water in the well. The Muslim prayed to Allah. “Allah, help me!” And Allah helped the Muslim get out of the well. The Christian prayed to Jesus, and Jesus helped him. The Hindu prayed: “Ganesha, help me! Brahma, help me! Vishnu, help! Hanuman, help me!” And he continued calling on all the Hindu Gods to help him. The Gods started arguing between themselves, Hanuman saying: “Ganesha help him!” Brahma: “Hanuman help him!” And so on. In the end no one helped the poor Hindu and he drowned. The moral of the story, according Sharath was: “Believe in one God! If you believe in one God, that God will help you in any difficulty you will meet in life.”<sup>165</sup>

This shows that, among the students, this is a topic and a question that is thought about, that they find important and, in particular, one that many students have some trouble establishing a satisfactory answer to. Although Marianne views yoga as a spiritual practice, she was rather upset, and Sharath’s answer had provoked her. His answer was something that she could not quite stomach and it made her protest. First of all, she found it very un-philosophical, and asked how someone could answer like that without even trying to deduce what the notion of God might actually mean. The notion of God and, perhaps, also “believe” should be defined so as to tell us more

---

<sup>165</sup> 171706022011

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

clearly what his answer might actually entail. Part of the problem, she admitted, was that her own notion of God had much to do with her upbringing and with a Western view of God as a personified, predominantly male figure who rules everything. She just could not accept that to practice yoga, you have to believe in such a figure. She was more inclined to talk about spirituality and the God or the Holy inside every human being. She personally believed in some greater power that influences the greater lines of causality in life, though she also believed that each and every one of us also has the power to influence these lines if we work hard to attain what we want.

Marianne’s reaction, though stronger perhaps than most, illustrates some of the dilemma. The question of believing in God begs several other questions. First of all: Which God? Or rather: What is this “God” that is asked about? There is also the question of what “believing” entails. The same questions, “which” and “what”, apply to this notion. The question of believing in God is also related to one central notion in yoga, which is surrendering to God. The last of the *niyamas*, which is *ishvarapranidhana*, means “to lay all your actions at the feet of God.” (Desikachar 1995: 102; see also Pattabhi Jois 2002: 16). The centrality of the notion of “God” also points to “larger” topics and questions surrounding the practice of yoga. These topics concern the notions of what “religion” is and what “spirituality” is. Is there a difference as some current theories in the social sciences imply (e.g., Heelas 2008), and to what degree are these notions “known” by the wider population – that is: can and should yoga be tagged as a religious or a spiritual practice, or is it “just” a physical/gymnastic exercise?<sup>166</sup> Is it the scientist’s task to decide or is the practice too individual to decide for all practitioners? There is also the topic of cultural differences in the notion of “God” and “believing”. Is a “belief in God” only possible in a Western secularized society, or is it just that “believing” is different in a Western view from an Indian/Eastern view? A prevalent idea among many Western yoga practitioners in Mysore was that the Indians do not need to practice yoga (and very few do in “our” sense of the word), because everything they do is yoga (which, to some degree, can be claimed to be correct since yoga can also be *bhakti* or devotional yoga). These are interesting topics to expound upon since notions of “religion”, “spirituality”, “science” and “self-realisation” are terms that, together and separately,

---

<sup>166</sup> For an instance of presenting yoga as “not a religion” see the web-page “MUDRA” <http://www.home.no/mudra/enyoga.htm>



are controversial and debated, in academia, the media and among “lay people”. The recent turn towards a notion of “spirituality of self” (Heelas 2008), which separates spirituality from its bonds to “higher” or more “metaphysical” entities, is also interesting in these regards. Hopefully, this exposition can shine some light on the relationship between “religion”, “spirituality”, “science” and “self”, though I do not mean to cover all the mentioned topics.

Indian notions of God or the Gods is, of course, also different, and a Hindu’s relations to his or her God is not necessarily the same as a Western Christian’s relationship to his or her God. As for the Western notion of God and being a believer, in Norway, we talk about being a “personal Christian”, as opposed to being socialized into a traditionally and predominantly Christian culture or worldview. In India, the Gods seem to be much more involved in peoples’ everyday lives, while processes of secularization, at least in the popular understanding, has relegated God to limited time-slots, happenings and spaces in Western societies. Commenting on Sharath’s answer, Elin made an interesting observation. In saying that you have to believe in “one God”, Sharath might actually be keeping the practice very open by not stating explicitly who this God is and what it might be made up of. Perhaps, it also could be God or the godly within every human.<sup>167</sup> Interestingly, both Marianne’s reaction, and Elin’s comment on it, are interpretations that take place *within* the yoga practice, and must, as such, be seen as some kind of “theological” debate about the place and role of God in relation to yoga. There are also the differences between the roles and places of Gods and beliefs in India and in many Western societies, which is a discussion that takes place both within and outside the yoga community and in both academic and lay<sup>168</sup> circles.

At a later conference (February 13<sup>th</sup>), the talk, again, turned to God and religion as a student asked Sharath what he thought of the confusions between yoga and religion, and, from what I could gather of the question and the following answer, the mixing of different religious and spiritual ideas. Sharath rhetorically asked if yoga is only a Hindu practice, and not, say, a Christian practice. He then stated that it does not say

---

<sup>167</sup> 123108022001

<sup>168</sup> “Lay”, here, implies the yoga community. But it is important to note that debates concerning “God” and “religion” are also abound in “Western society”, perhaps more so in Europe than in the USA.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

anywhere that only Hindus can practice. There are no limitations. The “Yoga Sutras” do not say that they are only for Hindus. Anyone can practice if they are intelligent enough. “This is the good thing about the Hindus,” he continued with a smile, “we share our knowledge.” He connected the part about being “intelligent enough” to following the *niyamas* and the *yamas*.<sup>169</sup>

### The beliefs of aspiring yogis

Especially in the USA, there is a clear-cut border between believing and not. Being “a believer” means believing in God – as in the Christian almighty God – and “religion” and “being religious” are mostly associated with being Christian. This might be true for society seen as one, but in other circles, being religious or spiritual is connected to a wider spectrum. George says:

I don't believe in the God that we were brought up with... I mean... people say “do you believe in God?” and people who say “no” then everyone judges them, like “oh, my God, you're an atheist” but what they don't understand is... what the people that say “no, I don't believe in God” - what they don't understand, I think, is that... They don't believe in the God they were told to believe in. But they don't know any better, so they call themselves atheists. But in... I think the atheists are the biggest believers that I've come across. They are more open to the mystic side of living than people who say they believe in God. So I think being an atheist is a step in becoming more of a believer in God. I think that if you don't reach that level, you're stuck in believing a God that you were taught to believe in. That may or may not exist. Haha. But; “do I believe in God?” No, I don't believe in the God I was told to believe in, this being that watches over us and says you're good or bad, and we go to heaven or hell. No. Hehehe. So I don't know what God is yet. But I believe in something bigger than myself, but I don't know what that is.

George does not believe in the God he was told to believe in, but he does believe in something bigger than himself, although he does not know what this bigger something might be. He also thinks that being an atheist is a step in another direction, away from just believing in something you are told to believe and towards something that is closer to what is real. That might be something closer to what is experienced in one's own life. George also touches upon a perhaps mostly American idea, of the divide between those who believe in God and atheists. It seems that in America, one either

---

<sup>169</sup> 182313022011, and notebook p. 47-61.

believes in God or one does not and is, instead, an atheist. This might not be such a clear-cut case in Europe. George says that, to him, atheists are bigger believers than those who cling to what they have been told and brought up with. Atheists are, as such, more open to the mystic side of life, in his words, because they are no longer stuck in a habit or tradition – they are on the move, so to speak.<sup>170</sup> (George’s way of using “atheist” is, perhaps, more in line with what, in Europe, would be called an “agnostic”.) He believes in something bigger, though. I asked him if he just does not know what this “something bigger” might be, and he answered:

Hm... I think we can never know that answer, I think we can get... we can slowly get deeper into that answer, but I don’t think we can honestly say... we can finish like; “Oh, I know now what God is, I’ve entered... I’ve become one with God in my meditation.” I don’t think that...  
Hahaha

The search for God – or this “something bigger – is as such an ongoing process that never ends. According to George we can never fully know God, we can only slowly get closer. That being said, George does not necessarily strive for this closeness anyway. God is not the ultimate goal of his practice. Knowledge of God is not what he’s searching for, instead he says:

I’m just... honestly I’m just... I wanna feel good. I want to not suffer. And I want to improve... increase this process I’ve been going through, with my mind being not bound by anything. I feel like I can go into any activity with... like I feel like I’m not smartest person in the world. I have a lot of... like my memory is horrible, so Academics are very difficult for me. But I feel like I can go into things and learn things on a deep... I feel like I’m smarter and I can learn things deeper in my own way. For example regarding chess. I’m not a natural chess player. I don’t feel that I’m extra smarter than anybody. I’m probably even less smart... Hehehe. But I feel like I’ve learned how to learn. I’ve learned how to progress at something. I don’t know. I feel like I’m playing the best chess in my life. Just... being in the different space that I am, and that... Like learning chess, I used to be afraid. I used... I’m learning chess because I’m so fearful of being stupid. So fearful of not being smart. That there was a desperation, for learning chess. And you can’t learn chess that way. I feel like I don’t have that anymore. I don’t have that heaviness anymore, now I’m just free to learn it. So that is what I’m doing, and... Now I’m playing on an amateur level of chess, but I’m improving. And that’s what I’ve learned. Someone told me “I want to do yoga, but I’m not flexible.” Hehehe! (...) And the

---

<sup>170</sup> It might of course be claimed that atheists are likewise stuck, but stuck at the other end of the scale – at the non-believing end – but this depends of course on where you have come from (and where you might be going).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

answer may seem... obvious, but it really isn't. It's not how flexible you are and what postures you can do, it's the... your ability to improve. I know... I mean, there's lots of yoga masters out there that didn't really have to improve that much to become a yoga master. But... just to improve is a...I think, the best thing. Whatever it is. Flexibility, strength, chess, being happy, scholastics, whatever it is, you just improve whatever you're doing. Don't be stagnant, whatever you're doing. Don't be afraid to learn.

Yoga is not, first and foremost, about God, spirituality or, even, believing, but still it is about handling life and finding your way. George does not want to suffer or live in fear. To him, yoga is about learning and mastering something that, initially, was very difficult. No longer is there desperation or heaviness in his learning. He is not fearful of being stupid. Yoga is about the ability to improve. It is about not being stagnant, and not being afraid of learning.<sup>171</sup> As such, George's yoga practice has changed him and his way of being in the world, and it is empowering him. George's take on “God” and “religiosity” shows the need to keep an eye on the “cultural (and personal) background” that these statements are made against. His dichotomisation of “believers” and “non-believers” makes more sense in an American than in a European context, and this might also be part of the reason why he labels himself and his practice as he does.

On August 10th 2011, the Yoga Journal daily newsfeed asked the question “Is yoga a religion?”<sup>172</sup> The newsfeed goes on to discern between “religion” and “spirituality”. While pointing out that most Westerners take up a yoga practice for health benefits, the authors also points to the fact that many aspiring yogis report spiritual experiences in their practice, and that most will come to see their practice as a spiritual practice. Yoga Journal explains the difference between “spirituality” and “religion” thus:

Spirituality, it could be said, has to do with one's interior life, the ever-evolving understanding of one's self and one's place in the cosmos—what Viktor Frankl called humankind's “search

---

<sup>171</sup> Though this might not be doing George a favour, since he is somewhat distancing himself and his practice from notions of “God”, “religion” and “spirituality”, and thus, would not necessarily agree, this can be linked to such notions as Heelas' “spirituality of life” (2008) where authority etc. is gathered from the depths of the self. Heelas (2008) with this motion also separates “spirituality” from any kind of “transcendence” or “transcendent” entities.

<sup>172</sup>

[http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/283?utm\\_source=DailyInsight&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=DailyInsight](http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/283?utm_source=DailyInsight&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=DailyInsight)

for meaning.” Religion, on the other hand, can be seen as spirituality’s external counterpart, the organizational structure we give to our individual and collective spiritual processes: the rituals, doctrines, prayers, chants, and ceremonies, and the congregations that come together to share them. (Yoga Journal, newsletter Aug. 10<sup>th</sup> 2011, see note 172 page 274 for web-address.)

Though their definition of “spirituality” is not too far from, for instance, Heelas’ (2008) understanding, their way of explaining “religion” is perhaps more dated, and it bears some resemblance to Durkheim’s famous definition (1979) by focusing on the social aspects, as well as ritual, though it lacks his symbolical interpretation of society worshipping itself (Bowie 2006; Durkheim 1979). “Religion” has been understood and defined numerous ways (Bowie 2006). Yet, these understandings have trickled into public life, and the debates, emotions and controversies surrounding the term “religion”, in itself, are, of course, adding to the conundrum.

Jennifer, according to herself, has never been religious, and, though people say Ashtanga is not a religion, she claims Ashtanga and religion have a lot in common. She explains what she means as she closes in on a similar understanding of religion to the one presented in Yoga Journal:

[I have] never read the bible and know very little about religion, but... there’s a structure to it, he [Sharath] is the guru, we are the people practicing. Same as, this is the bishop, this is the priest, this is the person in the confessional box. And there’s a shared notion that like God is within all, or like inner guru concept. But nonetheless, he’s the one saying what to do, he’s the one who’s enlightened or, you know, called guru, and we’re not. Similarly it has a house that it takes place in, a place we all go to. There’s structure to it, there’s ritual, you know like you don’t do it when there’s the moon, I mean... to me like, even if it was a pagan religion, these all sound pretty close to religion. There are practices, like non-stealing, not lying, it’s dictated how you should be living. Even in some cases, like Upanishads, like when you should be having sex... and all these things, like what you should be eating. I mean, in “Yoga Sutras”, they outline, like, if you’re a student, if you’re a lay person, if you’re a yogi, if you’re like the highest level of being, this is how many morsels of food you should have each day.

First, this points to a certain view of what religion is, which is rather Durkheimian (Durkheim 1979). Jennifer also alludes to common yogic notions of God, and God within us all, or an inner guru, though she herself does not explicitly confess to such a view. Still, she, for now, has faith in the practice and in Sharath, and she sees parallel

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

structures in yoga and religion. She still hopes she will be able to retain her own will and ability to do only what feels right, though, as seen above. Again, it is clear that her own experience is crucial to her in deciding what the right thing is for her to do.

“Religion” seems to be a more controversial term than “spirituality”. Martin, like George, feels that it is necessary to explain what he means by “religion” and “God” before he can actually answer the question of whether he believes in God or not.

Yeah... well my personal story of God is that, before this Indian philosophy thing, I would have said no. I would have said that I was not even an agnostic, but that I was basically, there was just no belief. It wasn't that I was hedging my bets. There was no belief. You know, I would have said. But the reality is that it's because I never thought about it. It was just something that I was prejudiced from school days. From having Christianity rammed down my throat. And so I just didn't want anything to do with that God. You know, with the God of the bible and the religious education teacher, who was just really obviously an idiot. He was just an idiot. A bigot and fool, and a Christian. So I wanted nothing to do with all that. And then philosophy came at it from another direction. It was telling me that God was sort of an all-inclusive thing, and that we are parts of the God. God is, you know, I think they said, that's God riding a God coming down the God, he's gonna come and meet the God, he's gonna eat some God, he's, you know, whatever. So then you start thinking, well ok. So it's just a... God isn't this old man in a cloud with a beard. It's something that includes... So, I mean, I still don't like that word, but I've spent so long at that school and they started using that word. When we started out, they would say the Self, or the Observer, the Universal Self, or whatever, and then they would sometimes use the word God, and you just get used to that word. So the short answer is yes, but I don't believe in a religious God. I'm not religious. I see a huge distinction between religion and God. I see that religion is a method that's basically failed to describe God, you know, in almost every case, and it's actually produced the opposite effect, it has produced hatred, misunderstanding, miscommunication. So yes, I believe in God.

So, Martin believes in God, but not in a religious God, and he would not call himself religious. He sees the need to separate himself and his views from what he associates with religion, in general, and with Christianity, in particular. This is rooted in personal experience, particularly in his encounter with a teacher who was a bigot, a fool and a Christian. By encountering and experiencing a different way of seeing and interpreting “God”, he slowly, after becoming accustomed to this new usage, came to believe. God is everything, and everything is God. Martin also separates yoga from religion, which, to him, has failed in explaining God:

Religion has kind of set itself out to explain God, you know. Whereas philosophy is trying to explain everything, you know what I mean? My girlfriend is Thai, she's a Buddhist. Their culture is in that respect perhaps where we were in the 1950s where it was almost a given that you went to church, and you prayed even if you didn't... so I walk down the street with my girlfriend, and there are little temples and little status everywhere on the street and, unknowingly to her, she has to do that \*putting his palms together, bowing his head slightly\* every time! Every time! Every time she has to do that. And we've talked about it, and she's an intelligent woman, and it's not meaning to criticizing her, I just point out that it's a weird thing. What do you think you are doing? And she doesn't really know. And once a month she feels impelled to go to the temple and talk to the monk and give them some money and have their advice and whatnot, maybe it's good advice, I don't know, but it's because she's a Buddhist. It's like... it's weird.

Here, "religion" seems, for Martin, to be an entity that is habitual and not reflected upon. Believing is a habit, and it is something you just do. It is something that is just there, taken for granted and passively left to unfold. Religion is about explaining God, in Martin's opinion, but, in this endeavour, it has failed. Yoga – as a philosophy – sets out to explain everything, rather than "just" God. Martin's main faith is in the practice as such, and his craving is not for enlightenment or release, which is something he answers when asked about what yoga is for him. In his answer, he also connects the practice of yoga to "God":

I think... it's probably different for different people, but... for me, I mean, Suresh and Sharath says it's a route to God, isn't it, that's what he's saying. You know, as Gurdjieff said, you can... a route to God can be painting a door. It can be making a good pair of shoes. It's doing anything with the correct dedication and the correct concentration and the being in the present moment. So yeah, it's a route to God, I suppose, but then so is anything. The difference, it's apparently a bit easier to apply in this practice, than painting a door or making a pair of shoes, whatever, you know. We feel that we're doing something... its bringing closer to ourselves, which is God. You know what I mean? I feel layers of non-sense being removed, and I feel getting possibly closer to a real Martin, let's say, or real, *the* real identity. If anything, I mean, some of the personality is being shed, some of the rubbish that I come out with of all this, you know... it's diminished, and I'm a bit closer to the real person. And I think Ashtanga is helping do that, you know. I don't know if it's because it's so difficult, or... but it does seem to produce that effect. You know, friends and family say I've become a nicer person. I feel that's true. But I do toy with; is it really just a really excellent exercise? I do toy with that as well some times. I have a certain amount of faith, and so I have faith as I said in Sharath and Guruji

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

and the system. I don’t need absolute proof, I don’t really need a book of words, I practice it because it feels right, and I sort of believe them when they say that it’s... the benefits it’s giving us. But, you know, nobody has become realized through Ashtanga as far as I know, even Sharath who’s on sixth series or whatever he’s doing, you know he’s not a realized man, and he said in conference last week; we’re not yogis, we’re practitioners. We’re nowhere near yogis. So then you think; well, why the hell are we bothering for then? He believes in *karma*, and so he thinks that if we do this in this life, we’ll be closer to realization in the next life or... Maybe it’s like that, I don’t know.

The practice draws us closer to ourselves, and that means that it is drawing us closer to God, in Martin’s view, since the only notion of God he buys is that God is everything. In practicing, he feels that he is shedding layers of nonsense, and that he is getting closer to “the real Martin” – closer to a more authentic self. Having faith in the practice, in Guruji, Sharath and the system, and committing to it, is what matters. He believes that, even if the practice does not release or enlighten anyone, and even if he is not into reincarnation, as Sharath and Indians are, it has huge benefits.

In contrast to George’s, Marianne’s and, in particular, Martin’s view, Helena explicitly, and to a large degree, not only ties her yoga practice, but also her life in general, to God. When asked to state her name, age and origin for the record in the interview, she answered:

Ok. Ok, good. So my name is Helena, next month I will be 29. I was born in Poland, live in... Has lived in Chicago for the past 15 years. I should say the states, because different parts of the states, for the past 15 years. But Chicago is my home. Other than that... This is just geography and this is just, you know, labelling and the name this and that, but I have deep faith in God, so therefore I always - now being in India actually... this... as this transformation is happening, every time I hear that question “where are you from?” I always say; “from God.” So we’re all from God, and that makes me... come from there.

Helena says she is from God. According to her, we all are, and it is God that has led her to the practice and to India. God has guided her to where she is in life. Earlier, she has been uncomfortable talking about God and her belief because people are not interested or else they become hostile when the topic is brought up. People are judgmental, she says, and continues:



Yeah... Yeah... People have little faith, that's what it is. So whenever people have little faith, you can't have an open conversation, because they close, right? So for me it was a very gradual process, and I guess the amount of my faith did not allow for me to be as open, right? So for me to realize and understand that everything is God took me a while. And the event that happened to me compassion-wise after practice, it wasn't something that I cultivated, I mean yeah I did practice... did it, but it wasn't like... my creation. It wasn't a creation of this mind, or... it was huge, it was enormous, you know, in fact it was extensive, it was big, it was a big connection, it was a big vibration, it was a big breath, it was God. In a form of compassion. It was huge. So now... knowing all that, and coming to India finally, in India I didn't have to go through a process with my mind, in mind, of telling myself "ok, now you're in this place, you can let go, you can connect the events."

Helena points to a similar schism as George, where there are those who believe in God and those who do not, a schism that, in the past, made her very wary as to who she would talk to about her faith. Helena and George seem to have somewhat similar worldviews, where there is either faith or no faith, and where these opposing views of the world meet with some hostility, but, whereas George does not believe, Helena does. Helena's notion of what God is is actually rather similar to Martin's. God is everything, and although she does not contrast her notion of God with the Christian God, it is perhaps closer to other images of God and godliness. She has gradually come to these insights, and coming to India has brought everything together and connected events of even her earlier life. Something brought her to the practice and something brought her to India, and, in Helena's mind, this something was and is God. As for yoga, it is basically unity, and this unity is spiritually charged:

Right now.... yoga, when I use the word yoga right now, after India and after this experience, and after the experience of seeing that some people don't connect *asana* practice with spirituality, yoga is really unity for me. It really, really is unity, in this really deep sense. (...) Yoga really is union. And union on different levels, first of course the body and the mind, but union, I really have that ultimate goal in my consciousness somewhere, to dream of if, it's there. I don't deny it, I don't.... I really... the unity of, for me, of soul and spirit. I guess also it came after, in the [Bhagavad] Gita I read a beautiful way of explaining it, the spirit being kind of like the sun, and the... all souls, all of us, being like its rays. And we all have to connect to the sun, back to the spirit. And whenever we reach the union, that's when we unite with the spirit. That's when it's over, that's when we don't have to be reborn again. And that's really what yoga is for me, that really... that dream of attaining that. That's what it is.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Me: And... Yeah, you’ve kind of said this, but how does this parallel the notion of God? Or what God is to you?

Helena: God is everything for me. But I think at this point... at this point, since I live a life of duality.... there is trying to understand and remember that God is everything in this material world, but also there is the notion of uniting with God. The soul uniting with God. So at this point, right now, of my practice, there are those two main aspects of recognizing God in everything, right now as I am still in this duality form, really connecting God to everything and as much of it... and relying on just God, and surrendering to just God. When it comes to everything. Just doing that type of work. And then again, having that final unity somewhere, in the dreams. I think that’s how I would put it. And of course, here and there, recognizing that... it’s just... it’s a... Sometimes I forget more, and sometimes I’m so in it.... It’s fascinating, it’s interesting.

Yoga is unity, and God is everything. Some describe *samadhi* as just this – uniting with everything, which is God. While practitioners establish their own interpretations to “God” and “religion”, surrendering to God is a central notion in traditional yoga philosophy, after Patañjali, which makes resolving the “God question” even more pressing. While Helena has found God, Damien is more hesitant in his relationship to God. When asking him whether he believes, he says:

Ahm... I do. Grudgingly. I mean... not necessarily like a Christian God or anything specific, but in overriding energy, you know. Whatever animates this matter. In my native language - my native language is Anishinaabe, and our word for the creator is Gichi-manidoo, and so I don’t pray often, but at the end of my practice I give thanks to Gichi-manidoo, the creator, just for letting me experience as much as I have. I never... My parents died when I was very young, so I really had no model for life after 30. And... you know, so I’m really making this all up as I go along. And I think I kind of like it that way. It’s nice. I think the worst thing in the world would be to know what every day for the rest of your life holds. And, yeah, this is a great way to keep it changing, keep it evolving constantly.

Asking him whether the spirituality and the belief in God is tied his practice, he continues:

It’s coming more, yeah. Slowly. It’s nothing... I’m not trying to force it or... it’s just naturally becoming a... I’m just grateful, you know, and there’s something that I need to be grateful to. Because this is pretty amazing. I’ve been incredibly blessed, I’ve faced a lot of adversity, but at the same time, I’ve had so many blessings. I really can’t even say. It’s amazing. And I don’t

need to work, I'm independently wealthy, and so it's nice to have something to get me going. A lot of people in my situation wouldn't wanna do anything. Like: "oh, right!" You can live on the beach for the rest of your life. So yeah, it's my way to get to myself, to get to the creator, you know. I'm not too... I'm never very preachy about it, I don't like to talk about it that much, it's all... it's very personal.

Damien, like George, ties his practice to evolving and changing. As for his relationship to and belief in God, he, again like George, does not want to get too specific. There is a belief in something beyond, something bigger than himself, in George's words, or in an overriding energy, as Damien puts it. He is not all too happy about this belief, as he says he grudgingly believes, but this reluctance seems to partly be tied to an "older image" of what God supposedly is. Damien now ties his practice and his beliefs to his Native American God, Gichi-manidoo, the Creator, and gives praise and thanks to him after his practice, in particular, for letting him experience all that he has. He feels blessed in having received the chances that he has. He also states that he is making it up as he goes along, underlining that he has not really had anyone to look up to in these matters. It is all based on his own experience, which is unfolding and gaining meaning as he goes along. This is in line with George's statements on atheists being more open to change (although most atheists might not agree with these notions). His beliefs are also tied to the feeling of being blessed, and where he is in life after what he has gone through. And most importantly, his practice and his beliefs – and his talks of "spirituality", rather than religion – are highly personal, they are his and no one else's.<sup>173</sup>

Sonja, the Finnish student with a background in gymnastics, somewhat in line with Yoga Journals claim on August 10, 2011<sup>174</sup> that most will come to see their practice as a spiritual practice, has slowly gone from practicing a purely physical practice to realising that there are spiritual aspects to it. She talked a bit about the spirituality and the spiritual part of the practice, and she explained what she meant by spirituality:

---

<sup>173</sup> You can recall his statement on asking someone about their spirituality and *asana* practice in Chapter 4, page 123.

<sup>174</sup>

[http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/283?utm\\_source=DailyInsight&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=DailyInsight](http://www.yogajournal.com/lifestyle/283?utm_source=DailyInsight&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=DailyInsight)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Yeah, it is something that you can't touch, see, understand, maybe really, but something that you can feel and it's there. And through the *asana* practice, after all the cleansing and... The more you do, the deeper it goes, and I've noticed that in this time that I've been here, it's those different layers that I go deeper and deeper. So this makes me also more sensitive to different things and kind of through that is coming more intuition. More feelings about different things. So this gives also kind of courage to believe into something that you can just believe or not. And because for me, I've always felt that there is a lot of other things than what we can see or understand. But... it has been kind of difficult to find the way. How to experience and maybe to trust myself. And... So through these things I find more... something really deep - deeper and higher. Yeah... this is also... I know you asked me “what is spirituality?” but I'm just kind of going in there with different kind of ways. And this is also like about the texts and the philosophy that I... These years that I've been practicing, I've been reading some books, but I kind of like just reading, and then you are like “yeah...”. You know, it's very difficult to understand. And they say that this is like, you just have to practice and through your own experiences you can actually understand. And this is what I've found. That now that I read those same things, many times I've read before. I can actually be in some parts of it like: “Ah! Really!” and this is like about mind, about spirituality. So; “what is spirituality and what I have experienced?” I guess it's something that is there. And something that is all around us, and it's kind of like we are part of it all of us, and I've had these feelings, like if talking about how everything is one. So maybe it's also like a strong feeling that I'm part of something. And not just like, you know, that part of “we are all the same” like the people that we have connection. Not just that, but like with everything. With the nature and the animals. And here because this country is also very rich and beautiful in... There are colours, there are smells, there's spirituality everywhere, like people are practicing their religion next to you, every day, all the time. So all this helps. So... so maybe it's the kind of strong feeling of oneness and having connection and contact with all kinds of living. Which is kind of like the fact. It's not just that I can see things or... it's nothing peculiar. It's just very true. Yeah.

So, for Sonja, spirituality is experienced through the practice, and her quote links the body to spirituality in a way that resonates deeply with my exposition on the body and the unfolding of significance in Chapter 5, and with Bohm's (1995, 2002, 2011) subtler levels of meaning. The practice connects her to something deeper and higher, and she recognizes herself and her experience in what she reads. As her practice deepens, her understanding of the yoga philosophy unfolds, changes and also deepens. She feels connected and a part of something wider and bigger. In this quote, she also connects spirituality and religion, and says that because there is “spirituality everywhere” and there are “people practicing their religion next to you” in India, it helps her feel the oneness and connection to all living things. Since she is in the

process of realizing these aspects of her own practice during her stay in Mysore, she tries to expound upon the experience in the interview. Sonja says that she does not really know what God is, but that she has always believed in something, and she believes more strongly these days. These beliefs are connected to her practice:

Yeah, I am connected to something larger and bigger through the practice. And maybe it's also like through the practice, when you are really concen... when you have been like cleaning yourself, like your body and with the breathing and focusing like what you are doing, and that's why they have all these *bandhas* and *dristis* and the *vinyasa*. That those are tools for you to kind of get rid of the things and shit. And then when you have been... keep on doing that it's like there's less everything. So you can... what I felt sometimes when practicing, it's the kind of emptiness. That there's nothing. You know? But nothingness is the everything. I'm being kind of connected to everything.

She grapples with what God might be and identifies God with something larger than herself. Sonja, to a large extent, connects this to her practice. It is first and foremost in her practice that she makes and understands this connection. Through her practice, she gets rid of things, and, sometimes, she gets to a point where she feels a kind of emptiness. This emptiness is her connection to this “something larger and bigger” because this emptiness is also everything. She goes on:

And maybe that kind of nothingness, it comes from the purification that... just like the physical thing, that I'm just happy how I am like this, and kind of feeling very clear physically and my mind. And... Yeah. So it's kind of like... well maybe getting rid of some of the ego to, but that's something that I can't really that much - the ego thing. Hahaha. Yet. But this is how it has been feeling. It's like layers, layers, layers. You're cleaning and you're cleaning, and then you're getting into something... to me it has been now maybe the nothingness, which is the everything.

Through her practice, she is shedding layers and purifying herself, much like Martin. In turning from spirituality to religion, she distances herself from the notions of being religious and of yoga being a religion, which is much in line with what I have quoted of George, Martin and Damien above. As Sonja says:

Ah... Maybe it [yoga] is a way of practicing some kind of religion, but I have never really been [a] very religious person. Spiritual maybe, yeah, but not religious. And in my family, we don't go to the church, we don't practice it, and also around me, like in my country and like

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

that... but it's a way... I think I've... these days I'm a little bit more religious than before. Hehe. Through the practice and being here in India. And it's kind of like the way it has been in my family in my country, the religion, I never felt good about that. Like if going to the church, then I don't... I can't tell the difference if it's a funeral or a wedding. It's like there is something wrong. And it's very \*in a dark serious voice\* serious, it's kind of like, you know, you are the sinner. This kind of thing. And I don't feel good about this. This is not right. But, yeah... and actually maybe during this trip that I've lived with the families, and I've seen them practicing their religion, it kind of like I can agree, and it makes me feel good. And I've kind of understood a little bit more Hinduism, and like God and religion in general. [Yoga is] spiritual practice but not religious, really, for me. But I think it's more of the background, and more my culture.

She sees a distinction between being religious, which she is not, and spiritual, which she is. Her notion of religion back in Finland is tied to the church and is very serious; it focuses on sin and negativity. In India, on the other hand, she has become a little bit more religious than before by seeing the Indian families practicing their religion. This has made her feel good, and she understands a bit more of what religion can be. Yoga, though, is not, in her view, a religious practice, but rather it is a spiritual one. Sonja is somewhat ambivalent to the questions of God, spirituality and religion. To some degree, she seems to want her practice to be more spiritual and, to some degree, she turns away from religion. It is okay to start doing yoga as an exercise, but, with time, it will become spiritual. She actually explains Ashtanga's popularity in Finland with its non-religious approach:

I think because this doesn't really have that strong religious side, like you just go to the class and do your practice and then you go home. And there is not really chanting and talking about God so much. In here, in the conferences, yes, but this is also we are here in India so people are more... you know. But in Finland, compared to maybe other yoga styles and spiritual practices, this is very simple, just physical exercise. So I think because of our culture also the religion - like 90 something percent people kind of maybe belong to the church, but only few percents of maybe those actually practice the religion. So I think that's one very big part. That Ashtanga is not like a religion, it's more like an exercise in Finland. But if you start it because of the exercise - so what. It's good. And then with the time, if you continue, you just do your practice, things happen. This is true. So I think that's part of it.

As we see in all these cases, there is a need to define one's own relationship to and belief in God. These are all highly personalized notions of God, religion and

spirituality, and they show that there are debates, or, at least, different views, within the yoga community regarding where the practice is located in regards to these notions. As the conference question on God's relation to yoga practice shows – and it has been posed on various occasions before – there is also some uncertainty with some practitioners about the necessity of believing. This being said, most are given the space to define their own worldviews.

What is striking in many of these worldviews, apart from the emphasis on being “self-made”, is the fuzziness of the notions. Both Sonja and George say that they believe in something, but what this something is, apart from something larger than themselves is not apparent, and seemingly not that important. It seems to be more important to say what it not is, and that it is based on one's own experience, than clearly defining what it is. George says: “I believe in something bigger than myself, but I don't know what that is.” He goes on to say that we cannot really know what God is, we can only slowly get deeper into that answer. Sonja is also shedding layers through her practice, as does Martin, and says: “... you just have to practice and through your own experiences you can actually understand. And this is what I've found.” She is slowly going deeper in her understanding, linking this to the spirituality of the practice, and *not* to any kind of religiosity. The spiritual aspect of the practice slowly and “naturally” emerges and manifests in the practice as it deepens.

### **The spirituality of modern-day yoga practice and yoga as a religion**

Regarding spirituality in yoga, Liberman (2008) claims:

In most places in the West where yoga is taught, the discussion of spiritual matters is not permitted or is considered proselytizing, and yet yoga without spirituality (here intended in a broad sense) is not yoga. (Liberman 2008: 112)

Though spiritual instructions are not abundant in Western studios, my material adds some shading to Liberman's (2008) claim. “Spirituality” is discussed among Western yoga practitioners in Mysore, and though not all the students ascribe to a “spiritual world view”, many do, often in opposition to “religion”. This makes the question of what Liberman (2008) considers to be “spiritual matters” a pressing one, for, as we have seen, neither “spirituality” nor “religion” is necessarily clear-cut concepts.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Rather they are interpreted and negotiated in relation to one’s own experience. As a scholar of yoga, Liberman (2008) ties yoga practice very closely to spirituality “in a broad sense”, as does many of the Mysore yoga students when they say that there are much more to yoga than just the physical exercise. Just what this “much more” part is, though, is open to interpretation. Liberman (2008), argues that *asana* is taught to pacify the nervous energy of the students, which is a way of personally experiencing the “... spiritual rewards of simpler ways of being...” (Liberman 2008: 112). As such the point of the *asana* practice is making the body fit for experiencing “spiritual rewards”. This resonates well with some of my informants, like for instance Sonja, who has grown to experience her yoga practice not just as a physical practice, but also come to view and experience it as spiritual. Liberman expounds upon the relation between yoga and spirituality:

Can there be an authentic yoga that is not oriented toward cultivating spiritual motives? Doing yoga is not like doing chin-ups, and the thoughtful cultivation of one’s nerves and energies has a spiritual purpose. This does not mean it has to be worded or clothed in Hinduism, but it is to be felt along with “the exercise” and within each part of the exercise. And in this regard, the teacher of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* must provide skillful guidance, for only confusion will result without it. (Liberman 2008: 112-113)

Interestingly, Liberman (2008) again transcends the scholar-practitioner boundary, and in his call for a more authentic yoga it might seem weird that it is ok to separate yoga from its Hindu roots. For him the authenticity apparently rather rests in retaining the spirituality of the practice. The spiritual purpose of the practice should be felt in every part of the practice. Does this mean that *any* spirituality is enough to make the practice of *asanas* into *true* yoga? This does seem a bit random when coming from a scholar who wants to champion the *authenticity* of yoga practice, but it is in line with Sharath’s words on the topic when he says that you should believe in God, but it does not matter which God you believe in. Liberman (2008) also points to the teacher – or Guru – as a beacon to light a path through confusion, and who can guide the students in the spiritual aspects of *asana* and *pranayama* practice. Or as Sharath puts it: “Students should have faith in their guru and the yoga practice, then only the jnana (knowledge) will flow to us. -- R. Sharath” (from: <http://kpjayi.org/newsletter.html> 23.09.09)



So, as we see, the practitioners' personal notion of God is not necessarily all that important, until they are faced with questions from others, statements from Sharath or the yoga literature. Mostly their belief and their practices is "just something they do and are". But at the same time, God, religion and spirituality are terms and notions that they, from time to time, e.g., during my interviews, are faced with and thus, reflect upon. At these points, they can come to be acutely aware and conscious of their own viewpoints in these matters, and, as we have seen, they mostly resort to their own experiences to fill in the blanks. Here, they look for what is and feels right for them. They find authority in their own lives and experiences, as well as in teachers and "gurus". What is relevant in these encounters with their own convictions, or lack thereof, are past encounters with religious beliefs and believers, and their past spiritual experience. It is not important whether these beliefs are "true" to the yoga philosophy or any other, more or less, established religious or spiritual movement. The point is that these are lived, functioning realities, where notions of God, religion and spirituality (and everything else) *become* relevant and under debate in certain situations. In day-to-day practice, these life-worlds form whole, all-encompassing realities where what seems to be logical incongruence only becomes visible when certain questions are asked, and even then, the practitioner's experience is able to cover what, by some people, might be thought of as weak spots. When a practitioner is not able to patch things up on his own, he asks other students or his teacher for guidance.

The question of whether yoga is a religion, or if it is even tied to religious beliefs, is above seen as something that the individual practitioner is somehow free to decide on their own, even if Sharath says that believing in God is necessary for practicing Ashtanga. The students are left to grapple with the Gods on their own. The question of God is not clear-cut and some students are struggling with coming to terms with it in relation to their own lives. Some of this hesitation might come from the yoga philosophy's emphasis on God and surrendering. The terms "religion", "God" and "spirituality" are themselves controversial and have to be defined and hedged in by the practitioners themselves. Many of them feel the need to distance themselves from "traditional" Christian images of God and religion. The practitioners base their beliefs and eventual images of God on their own experiences, both in the practice and in their lives. Thus, although they use, more or less, the same terms and vocabulary, they

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

place different emphases and meanings in their statements. This also works the other way around, I assume, so that practitioners coming from a strong religious or spiritual foundation will interpret their practice with this background. Many of the practitioners coming to Mysore to practice at the Shala, tie the practice to personal growth and diverse ideas of spirituality and religion. The images of “shedding layers” or “going deeper” are interesting in these matters, both in relating to the unfolding of meaning, and in relating them to Csordas’ (2004, 2009) understanding of religion and religious consciousness as stemming from a primordial sense of Otherness. First the latter: As the yoga students shed layers of nonsense or ignorance, they will encounter ever-new experiences of Otherness and alterity as they get closer to what they perceive as their “real selves”. In being altered by the practice, they keep encountering the Other in themselves. According to Csordas (2004), this implies that we can never “do away with” religion, as the experience of alterity is inevitable. As he writes: “... the reenchantment of the world imposes itself as soon as the disenchanted world finally becomes so familiar as to appear strange...” (Csordas 2004: 169). This applies both to a personal shedding of layers, as well as to the societal process of anxiety and doubt.<sup>175</sup> Csordas’ (2004) take on intimate alterity is consistent with Bohm’s (1995) theory of unfolding meaning through processes of soma-significance. As balance or harmony is found between intention and act, meaning can unfold unto ever-subtler levels, continuously shedding layers and encountering new imbalances or alterity, or in Csordas’ (2004) words “reenchanting the world”. There is, thus, a link that is established between physical practice/embodiment and spirituality or religion, following Csordas’ (2004) definition. A way of framing experience of alterity and intimacy with oneself (ibid.), can be through seeking and speaking of “reconnection” of body, mind and spirit – alterity – as yoga students do. Indeed, Csordas (2004) roots the possibility of dualistic thinking in “... the existential structure of embodiment itself” (Csordas 2004: 183). As mentioned in Chapter 7, this “reconnection” might perhaps be referred to as “embodied enlightenment”, as a sense of and intimacy with self is sought within.<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>176</sup> A peculiar observation is an objection Csordas (2004) anticipates to his thesis that alterity is the phenomenological kernel to religion. The objection, which he counters, “...is that the alterity I have described is everywhere and therefor it is nowhere and can account for nothing in particular” (2004: 173). Consider this against Sonja’s exposition above, which she concludes: “You’re cleaning and you’re cleaning, and then you’re getting into something... to me it has been now maybe the nothingness, which is the everything.”

This also can act as an experiential linkage to Heelas' (2008) notion of "spiritualities of life". In their encounters with alterity, the students continuously recreate and reenact themselves as they unfold new levels of meaning.

According to Mol (2002), objects are formed by the practices that surround them. In a similar vein, Law (2004), Latour (1987) and others of the ANT creed argue that reality is created through the method we decide to explore it with. Different methods create different realities, and in line with the proverb, "if the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem will look like a nail", the method is dependent upon the tools you have in your shed.

Though my recent introduction to Alexander Riegler's (2007) theories and radical constructionism means that I regrettably have a rather limited depth of understanding of its potential impact, it seems to me that his strain of thought might offer some psychological foundations to certain topics of reality creation. According to radical constructionism, cognition is situated and intimately connected to the workings of the body, and perception and action arise together and are mutually shaping each other (Riegler 2007). Arguing against cognitivism, and building on insights from neuropsychology and second order cybernetics, Riegler (2007) focuses on the *observing subject*, rather than the observed object. The cognitive system, or the "mind", is organisationally closed, and interacts only with its own states – "... it has no independent reference to what has caused the incoming electro-chemical signals" (Riegler 2007: 104). Cognition is thus a self-transforming activity, as change in a cluster of neurons leads to change in the state of interacting clusters of neurons. As a system the mind – cognition – is a closed system whose function is to regulate input. This is also basically what behaviour is: The regulation and control of input, or perception. The mind then, is a self-activating system, and cognition acts independent of the surroundings. "It merely requests confirmation for its ongoing dynamical functioning and works autonomously otherwise" (Riegler 2007: 104). We do take in the richness of the world through our senses, though, but we are crucially not limited by those senses. Since cognition is a closed system, knowledge cannot be gained by comparing an outside reality with an "enminded" image of that reality. According to Riegler, knowledge is not "justified true believes" as mainstream philosophy would have it, and "... correspondence with the real environment is not required for the

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

generation of knowledge” (Riegler 2007: 102). Knowledge is rather actively built by the thinking and perceiving subject (human or animal) since cognition is adaptive, and acts to organise the experiential world, rather than to the discovery of ontological reality.<sup>177</sup> As there is not gradual convergence between individually “constructed conceptual frameworks” (Riegler 2007: 105) and “objectively valid” systems of knowledge representing reality, emphasis in radical constructivism is put on cognitive systems as *actively constructing their world*. Similarly to both the Bohmian notion of soma-significance (Bohm 1995) and Piaget’s theories, Riegler (2007) assumes that “... knowledge is implemented in the form of schemata<sup>178</sup>, which consists of conditions and a sequence of actions” (Riegler 2007: 106, footnote added). Conditions offer context matching, which lets the most suitable schema for the present context fire its actions sequence. The conditions also act to continuously check whether the “anticipated meaning embodied by the schema” (ibid.) is on the right track. When the cycle of the schema is finished, a new sequence commences, which is parallel to soma-significance processes of unfolding meaning (Bohm 1995). In this context, knowledge refers to the ability of the cognitive system to link between present perception and older experience embedded in the system. This makes the mind an information *producer*, rather than just a processor. As information is created by the

---

<sup>177</sup> This is seemingly in line with such anthropological theories of categorisation as that of Mary Douglas (2002) and Edmund Leach (1979) although these are rather symbolic in orientation.

<sup>178</sup> Though there are similarities between Riegler’s (2007) use of the term “schema” and for instance D’Andrade’s (1992, 1995), which is inspired by cognitive psychology, there are as far as I can discern also substantial differences. Both say that schemata are organised hierarchical according to importance and generality and also that eventual triggering depends on context/condition, but D’Andrade’s (1992) usage seems more limited. D’Andrade (1992) writes that “... schemas are processes (...) and that specific interpretations, represented by particular patterns of activated elements, vary in degree of schematicity. To say that something is a “schema” is (...) saying that a distinct and strongly interconnected pattern of interpretative elements can be activated by minimal inputs. A schema is an interpretation which is frequent, well organized, memorable, which can be made from minimal cues, contains one or more prototypic instantiations, is resistant to change, etc.” (D’Andrade 1992: 29). What D’Andrade (1992) defines here seems closer to what Riegler (2007) describes as a schema of much *importance*, rather than a “schema” in general. As D’Andrade (1992) goes on to write about “the achievement schema” and the “get-in-line schema” he narrows the scope of what a schema is and can be, to something that we fit more or less within. In giving schemata specific content he limits their scope (Ibid.). There seems to be a limited series of schemata that we all have to a greater or lesser degree. In linking schemata to culture, he writes that, “... of the huge number of schemas every human learns, a very important subset are cultural” (D’Andrade 1992: 34). Compared to Riegler (2007), this seems to be turning the world on its head, as schemata are not something we learn or something that is laid upon us from outside. Rather, learning and what we learn are inscribed and might become schemata. We do not learn schemata. Learning can establish and create schemata (of varying importance and generality) and, though different people might seemingly learn the same thing, it does not necessarily inscribe the same action-condition sequences, which schemata are. In Riegler’s (2007) terminology, a schema is basically a dynamic and changeable sequence of conditions and actions, which can be, more or less, ingrained.

system, we see only what we attend to (Riegler 2007: 106), and since it is closed, the cognitive apparatus "... constructs its reality without 'knowing' that these inputs come from the sensory surface as there is no way to distinguish sensory signals from any other nervous signal" (Riegler 2007: 107). The schemata of independent conditions and actions are fuzzy, can consist of sequences of conditions and actions, and are "inscribed" into the system and organised hierarchically. Some sequences become habitual as the cognitive system "becomes used" to them, but as conditions and actions can change and sequences stop if they do not match the current state, the system is dynamic and flexible and can be altered. This amounts to "learning", which is guided by the *generality* and the *importance* of a schema. *Generality* reflects the specialisation of the schema, while *importance* is coupled with the number of conditions included. The more conditions included (i.e., the higher the importance), the more likely the schema will be enacted. Thus, the success of cognition is linked to the viability of schemata, and thus, success in the process of life. If our experience can be fitted into our schemata, our models of life, then they are viable. Such a notion of learning embraces both phylogenetic and ontogenetic survival and thus, learning, and thus, cognition is not limited to humans, which means that radical constructivism, in yet another sense, is compatible with the Bohmian process of soma-significance where the unfolding of meaning is omnipresent (Bohm 1995). Because of the interplay between actions and conditions, the cognitive system is dynamical and "unfolds cognitive competence over time" (Riegler 2007: 111). Knowledge is system-relative, and cognitive processes are situated and only modulated by and adapted to the environment, and as Riegler writes: "What a person knows today can have a completely different significance tomorrow" (ibid.).

Together with Mol (2002) and ANT's theories of how method and practice create objects and reality, Bohm's theory of soma-significance (1995) and Riegler's (2007) radical constructivism can help us further explain some of the aspects of yoga practice. The first aspect can be called the "self-energizing" or "self-reinforcing" effect of yoga. Partly, this is how yoga becomes "conscious" for the student, but it also accounts for stories of how yoga can come to be an *all-embracing* practice. As the students practice, they learn to recognise the patterns of yoga. They ask around, and are told by their teachers, about what their feelings – both physical and emotional – during the practice mean or signify. They also actively seek answers when they

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

experience new things or emotions, both in the practice and outside, as the practice deepen. After a while, they seek experiences that fit this patterns of knowledge and previous experience, and thus they reinforce the significance of their practice to ever-subtler levels (Bohm 1995). Or in Riegler’s (2007) phrasing, some schemata are more easily fitted into our experience and thus more viable. The yoga students “learn” yoga, and new condition and action sequences are fired and ultimately can be inscribed in the cognitive apparatus. Some schemata – here connected to yoga practice as the cognitive processes that are modulated by it – become associated with “success in life”. It might, perhaps, be argued that yoga, for the dedicated students, becomes linked to important schemata, which includes a broad range of conditions. The other aspect that can be explained by these theoretical contributions is that of “revolutionary” change, which occurs to some as they enter a yoga practice. This might occur when their previous knowledge and experience suddenly makes sense as they start practicing, or at some level of the practice. Thus, a life that has previously been experienced as “meaningless” – which it obviously has not been on a more fundamental level – can become meaningful and make sense. Suddenly, based on the experience of the practice, everything fits – life makes sense. As knowledge is a “relational dynamic structure” (Riegler 2007), it can be radically transformed and its significance altered as it is under continuous construction. Such reconfigurations are also similar to born-again Christians who sometimes interpret a harsh life as a “trial”. According to Csordas (2002), the way life events and suffering are reinterpreted and made coherent with religious themes is crucial to understand religious healing. Reality is thus constructed by the observing subject rather than merely mapped.

Here, we might be closing in on an alternative understanding of the term ”religion”, which does not so much evolve around the origin of religiosity, as does Csordas’ (2004) definition, but also deals somewhat with the “nature” or form of the phenomenon. I will suggest that “religion” can be understood as something that has an “all-encompassing gravity of signification”. Thus, religion is something that has an intentional depth that embraces most of the religious person’s behaviour. In Riegler’s (2007) terminology, we can talk of schemata with such *importance* that they are relevant in all (or at least most) contexts, and thus, have extensive power and influence. It is something very profound in the life of a person or a group of people.

In adopting such a view of “religion”, I am sidestepping the dichotomy that Bowie (2006) is drawing up between intellectualist and symbolist interpretations of religion. The intellectualist approach claims that religion is (primitive) man’s attempt at describing and explaining the world. Religion is, as such, created in the mind of the primitive philosopher who is trying to get a grip of the workings of the world in which he lives. The symbolist approach, on the other hand, views religion as a symbol, or representation, of some underlying structure. It is a story that society or man is telling about it, or himself, but which signifies some deeper truth about the relationships between humans and their surroundings (Bowie 2006). What these two interpretations of religion have in common is that they both take “religion” out of the world, or out of reality. The intellectualists locate religion in the head or mind of the philosopher who is observing the world, while the symbolists locate religion as hovering above reality, as something that gives reality meaning or tells a story about it.

In interpreting religion as “all-embracing” schemata, religion is brought back to reality or rather it is *becoming* reality. This is similar to the phenomenological approach, which sees religion, as all other experience, as lived reality and as *the world as it is experienced*. At the same time, such a definition of religion is more open than “the belief in Spiritual Beings” (Tylor 1979: 10) or “... a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them” (Durkheim 1979: 29) or even “the experience of alterity” (Csordas 2004), or any variety of these definitions. Though “religion” can be all these things, “religion”, in my interpretation, becomes any fundamental world-view or reality that is quite all-embracing in its signification and is relevant, significant, or meaningful in every context in a person’s life. Religion is schemata inscribed at the deepest depth of being: schemata, which all other schemata build upon.<sup>179</sup> Perhaps we

---

<sup>179</sup> In this understanding, religion might be said to approach something similar to (the popular understanding of) Kuhn’s (1996) paradigm, or is becoming “paradigmatic”. It becomes a framework within which (all) thinking and acting happens, but, too little or no degree, is viewed from the outside. In such instances, there is little or no sense in talking about “freedom” or “coercion” since both of these notions actually demand viable “alternatives” or “options” (which again, logically implies a comparison of some kind, and thus a meta-perspective) to be meaningful. Being all-embracing, or a paradigm, would, in the last instance, mean that *just this is all there is*, since no meta-position has been reached/is available. There would be no room for “alternative religious views” or other “religions” within a pure version of such a framework, since accepting other religions would imply a juxtaposition

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

could talk of a “religious reflex”. As such, it lends a religious hue to militant atheism, sceptics, “conspiracy theorists”<sup>180</sup>, some sports fanatics whose life is governed by the ups and downs of their favourite team, as well as (more “traditional”) religious extremists. It is also a way of personalising “religion” by approaching Heelas’ (2008) notion of “spiritualities of life” since, though the surroundings are important in modulating experience, perception, knowledge and thus, reality are constructed by the individual and his or her unique background. Though it is also social, since there are, as we have seen in the case of the yoga community, ongoing negotiations about what the most central elements of the practice are and how important they are to be.

Religion, in this approach, is of a higher dimensional order since it enfolds most aspects and the subtlest levels. It is of the superenfolding order. Put the other way: Religion is the higher dimensional orders, the higher dimensional orders are religion. Bohm (2011; see also Johansen 2008: 260ff) develops an ontology with three dimensions of order: sequential, generative and superenfolding. Sequential order of first and lowest degree is change of something; of second degree, it is change of change of something, etc. Generative order is change of one (particular) sequential degree of sequential order to another (particular) degree of sequential order, for instance from sequential order of degree 5 to sequential order of degree 8. Superenfolding order is change of one degree of generative order to another degree of generative order. Thus, there is a differentiation of degrees of order within each dimension of order, and “higher order” depends on the frame of reference, be it within the generative or within the superenfolding. A leap from sequential to generative order, or from generative to superenfolding, is upwards to a higher *kind of dimensional* order. Ontologically the superenfolding order inevitably soaks through. Unfolding into the superenfolding dimension represents a leap to a higher dimensional order. Religion thus enfolds everything and unfolds from everything. Process of soma-signification does not end at the skin, and thus, the world and its significance are enfolding in our bodies and our embodied diffused neural brains or minds, and the significance of our

---

of alternatives on the same ontological level. Instead, other “religious expressions” are understood *within* the all-encompassing framework as heretical, heathen, pagan or just plainly the devil’s work, and are of a different (usually lower) ontological order. Religion, in its fullest, would by nature be supreme, and all-exclusive and all-inclusive at the same time. Juxtaposing religious beliefs – in the traditional sense – imply that something else, such as “equality”, “human life” or even “money” – has gained more fundamental importance and, in a sense, are experienced as more fundamentally “real”.

<sup>180</sup> See note 118, page 196.



bodies are unfolded into our surroundings. We take our surroundings in through our senses, and fold our body out through our being.<sup>181</sup> Religion here is unfolding and becoming the whole of reality, relegating ever-subtler aspects to its sphere of relevance. As Bohm (1987) writes: “The very word ‘religion’ is based on *religare*, meaning to bind up, or it could be *religere*, which would mean to gather together, and the word ‘holy’ means whole... (Bohm 1987: 148). Though Fyhn (2011) says that all things gather, “religion”, in the sense that I am getting at, gathers all things, binds them together, and gives them “the same coloration”. Religion is something becoming absolute, and as Bohm (1987) claims, “religion” is the expression of man’s urge towards wholeness. At the same time, “religion” causes fragmentation when this wholeness is given definite form and attributed with certain characteristics.<sup>182</sup> Since “religion” is dealing with the nature of the absolute, there is no way to speak across such chasms of different natures (cf. Bohm 1987).

This renders such worldwide happenings as the reactions that in later years have been triggered by Muhammad caricatures and Quran burnings, and the celebration of the deaths of American soldiers in the demonstrations of the Westminster Baptist Church – actions and reactions that are often denounced as “irrational” or plain cruel in the latter instance – understandable. If we turn away from conventional ideas of what “religion” is and has become for us and define religion as “something of all-encompassing significance” we might see that two or more such “somethings” cannot exist side-by-side (in a person’s mind) since they are mutually exclusive. Two fundamental realities cannot be inhabited simultaneously. Thus, it is hard for pro-choice and pro-life/anti-abortionists to see eye-to-eye since life just starts at different points. Also fundamental Muslims and fundamental Christians have a lot in common in *having* schemata of all-embracing importance, but their realities do not leave room for other realities, and are thus fundamentally exclusive, and the enactment of one

---

<sup>181</sup> The latter is done even if the only thing granted is that we “project” our own emotions and ideas in-/onto the world. Though my argument is that this is much more profound than that “minimal understanding”.

<sup>182</sup> As such even “minimal” definitions of religion as “the belief in Spiritual Beings” (Tylor 1979: 10) or “the experience of alterity” (Csordas 2004) are relegating a delimiting and thus fragmented “nature” to this wholeness.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

evacuates all other potentialities. These realities dictate that there is only *one* reality.<sup>183</sup>

Furthering this argument, it can be claimed that theories of secularisation are correct since “traditional religion” indeed is losing its power in the Western world. Christianity is being juxtaposed with other religions and world-views, and this in itself is proof of its waning power and significance as *the* reality in which people are living. People are literally seeing other realities, and relegating “religion” to specific compartments and contexts. Christianity is becoming a schema triggered in only limited contexts. The old religious realities are being compared to (each) other(s), which show that they are being transcended. From a meta-position they are equal, and thus, they do not have the same existential force that they used to. That is, if it is experienced that various “religions” can be chosen between, these “religions” have lost their power and all-encompassing significance. This does not necessarily mean that we are no longer religious. Our “religious reflexes” have just been transformed and transferred to other arenas, and are given different expression. It is “just” the “religious expressions of yore” that have lost their fundamentality. If “religion” is a question of significance and fundamental relevance, anything can be done religiously and take on a religious dimension, become a religious practice, or be “a religion”.

In this perspective, “religion” is not an attempt at explaining the world or a symbol of reality. It is reality. Reality can be altered though, and what a person knows can change from one day to the other, as Riegler (2007) asserts. Sudden religious conversion can be an example of such reality alteration. And crucially, the change does not necessarily come from “outside”; it can also be a stroke, an epileptic seizure, the loss of a leg, a headstand altering a perspective or anything that causes a reconfiguration in the firing of schemata. Reality can be changed. Thus, yoga, in this perspective, becomes religion or a religious practice when yoga becomes the “prime

---

<sup>183</sup> Musing over these theories it can be argued that in defining themselves and their practices as “not religion” some of those who are the least opposed to the term are actually showing respect for “religion”, though not “religion” as “Christianity” or “Islam” but rather as an all-embracing signifier. Their practices are not practiced “religiously” – as Jennifer uses the term on page 89 – and do not have the “sufficient intentional depth” to be called a religion. It can be a way of accepting that people experience different realities, and not wanting to “ram religion down someone else’s throat”, to paraphrase Martin. The popular term “doing something religiously” can actually hint to an understanding of religion, which is similar to the one I have sketched above.

mover” in life, or when yoga comes to colour and enfolds all other aspects of reality. When it has been unfolded in such a way as to, in a Klein bottle movement, embrace every thing else in its signification, yoga has become *the* fundamental building block of reality, or as Bohm writes: “Religion, in its modern form, (...) does presuppose this ultimate ground of being out of which all emerges and unfolds” (Bohm 1987: 149).

In denoting the yoga community as a ‘corporation’ gathered around “yoga” as a comprehensive, extensive, and, utmost of all, all-embracing significance, as I did in the beginning of this thesis, yoga as an ‘estate’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1952) thus, also emerges as an interface or portal to *religare*. As such, this exposition is not necessarily tied “merely” to constructions *within* the yoga universe. It might be an unfolding or reconstruction of “some” *religare* or wholeness *beyond* the practice that yoga can take us closer to or is an interface with, but which, in certain respects, is privileged for certain individuals in a certain culture to step through. The act of stepping through such interfaces, or “encounters with the holy” (Raknes 1927), is irreversible reconfigurations and unfoldings of reality.

Yoga can be spiritual, scientific, therapeutic or an exercise; it can be all these things and none of them. As such, yoga fits rather well into the spirituality of life-category established by Paul Heelas (2008), where personal experience is the path to finding authority in life within one’s own being. Where yoga comes from, whether it is a thousands of years old religious ascetic practice of Hinduism, or whether it, in reality, is a physical exercise based on British line gymnastics, does not seem to really matter for the practitioners. Though most yoga students hold that yoga is an ancient practice rooted in Hinduism, they would, if that was contested, claim that they still experience benefits from practicing. What matters is what the practitioners themselves make of it. In relation to “God” and “religion”, these practitioners find a need to define and clarify their relationship to these “entities” since they associate certain characteristics with them. One reason for this need is the emphasis put on “God” and surrendering to God found in the yoga philosophy. In their daily practice most students might not have a clear cut understanding of and relation to this “God”, whatever that entity might be, but studying the yoga texts, being at conference and in conversation they are forced or encouraged to take stock of and reflect upon these items. Although the source of modern yoga is disputed, there is still a touch of “religion”, “God” and

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

“spirituality” in the texts regarding the practice, be they original Hindu texts or secondary literature and more modern guides to the practice. The opening mantra sung every morning in Mysore at about 0500 AM recognizes the importance of “Worshipping at the Guru’s feet” and respecting Patañjali with the thousands of snakeheads, who is also the author of the “Yoga Sutras”, and Sharath emphasizes the need to believe in and surrendering to one God. The students feel the need to clarify and distance their belief in God and their religiosity in contrast to “the Christian” or “traditional” religion/belief – to what they were brought up to believe in. Instead they will stress the personal and individual aspects of their beliefs. They have found and/or rejected their own Gods, based on their own experiences. Though yoga is cut loose from its specific religious background and it is stressed that there are no limits to who can practice, there is still, in Sharath’s interpretation, a need to believe, worship and surrender.

“Religion” and “spirituality” originally are Western categories that historically have emerged to make sense of our lived experience, and these categories have also been deconstructed and restructured time and again to fit our changing experience and “reality” – both individually and societally. And all such theorising on what religion is and does is of course influenced by the theorist’s own standing on the issues. The aspects are debated, scrutinized, sometimes criticized and mended to one’s own needs. The terms themselves are dissected; what does it mean to believe, what *is* God, what *is* religion, and does these notions mean different things in India and Europe or USA and elsewhere? Heelas’ (2008) notion of “spirituality of self” is itself a part of this attempt to make sense of a changing reality. Yoga practitioners are trying to merge their own notions of “spirituality”, “religion” and “God” with the terms and notions they encounter in yoga texts and in Sharath’s interpretations during the conferences. Sharath, himself, is trying the same. In these encounters there are continuous reconfigurations regarding what these notions might mean in the context of a yoga practice, and based on personal experience of yoga and life in general each practitioner individually reaches for an adequate definition or categorisation. As we have seen, most are to some degree able to resolve potential tensions and create a holistically oriented practice that “works” for them – after all the practice is *personal*, and you have to find out what works for *you* – while others time and again run head first into questions they alone are not able to settle – like “Do you have to believe in

God to practice yoga?” – and thus have to search for answers outside themselves and their own experience. The practitioners are continuously trying to make sense – not necessarily consciously – of their experiences of the practice, and life.

Trying to somewhat transcend the negotiations on “God”, “religion” and “spirituality”, I have taken a meta-perspective on “religion”. In dubbing “religion” as a fundamental reality from which everything else emerges, or something that has an all-embracing significance, I claim that yoga can be a “religious practice”, or a “religion”, when the practice and its (interpreted) philosophy come to frame all, or most, other aspects of a practitioner’s life. Yoga becomes the lived reality of the practitioners and all other experience is illuminated by and given significance through the practice. Such a “whole” can for instance unfold from continuous encounters with alterity, building on Csordas’ (2004) theories.

## 8.2 Individuality, spirituality and personal growth

Samoan tattoos reinforce the link to tradition and permanency. The symbolism of American tattoos may well represent nostalgia for a less mechanistic society, reaching out for personal power a yearning for affiliation with a supportive group or a quest for permanency that no longer exists. Overwhelmingly, the most popular tattoo images listed on the Tattoo design and Symbols website evoke associations with the past, or with fantasy and transcendence. (Womack 2010: 19)

Some of the most striking features upon entering the Shala the first few days were all the tattoos. As was apparent because in the heat most of the men wore only shorts and the women shorts and short tops or sport bras, many of the students, both men and women, flaunted huge tattoos. There were religious symbols, such as Om signs, Buddhas, Indian Gods and Goddesses. There were tribal tattoos, dragons and Japanese tattoos. It covered a whole lot of themes, and was somewhat of a surprise to me, because I had imagined that yoga students would be somewhat ascetic, and thus strive to keep the body pure. I thought that tattoos maybe could be considered defacing the body or polluting it. Thus I began incorporating a question about the tattoos into my interviews, and it became apparent that I was not the only one that found it striking – even people who themselves sported tattoos had registered their

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

presence in the Shala.<sup>184</sup> In this part I will attempt to illustrate societal trends concerning ideas of self, body, individuality, and spirituality in today's modern Western culture by delving into the connection between tattoos and yoga. I will argue that tattoos are a part of a modern body project where physical perfection, and body-projects are related to self, experience and own body as source of (spiritual) authority. The body and how it looks are also ways of expressing both belonging and individuality. Though, easily thought as antithetical to the austerity of yoga practice, I will show how getting a tattoo might also be part of the same body- and self-project as yoga. Although tattoos seem to be less rebellious than earlier, deciding to dedicate your life to yoga is outside the mainstream, and Ashtanga is even outside the yoga mainstream. Ashtanga yoga is for the few dedicated, and for some the tattoos become a sign of this “being on the outside”.

Related to this is the idea that yoga and particularly Ashtanga appeals to people who are already somewhat on the outside and have other ideas of “the good life”, that is – at least partly – people who already might have tattoos. As Jennifer put it: “Ashtanga appeals to people seeking some kind of extremes – the same kind of extreme that putting a needle to your skin for many hours is.” It is sensation seeking. Ashtanga is an extreme physical endeavour of both pleasure and pain, which is what some people get from being tattooed (Kraft 2005). The irreversibility of getting (large and visible) tattoos can be seen as a sign of dedication to a life less ordinary. It is a sacrifice, where the freedom of choosing differently – or “turning back” – some day in the future is made much harder, if not impossible, while other opportunities are laid open. Because of the visibility of the body, tattoos are presentations of self – both who you are and who you want to be or become. It is a way of inscribing not only your past, but also your (wanted or intended) trajectory through life. It's a way of making a stand. As such it can be argued that there is a certain social critique in appropriating the yogic lifestyle and choosing a way of living that is at odds with what most people deem as “normal”. The tattoos can symbolise the commitment to the reality of the yoga practice.

---

<sup>184</sup> A funny aside is that the Barbie Company has launched a “Yoga Teacher Barbie”. Apart from commenting that this testifies to how commercial and mainstream yoga has become, one commenter on [elephantjournal.com](http://www.elephantjournal.com) stated: “... and this is totally unrealistic...not enough tattoos and piercings ;p” (see <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/06/presenting-yoga-teacher-barbie/>). Keep the coming of “Yoga Teacher Barbie” in mind when reading the next chapter.

When I asked Martin, who himself has a small tattoo, about the ashtangis' ink, he answered:

I actually think that's kind of against the spirit of it in a way, even I have one, which I had before I found Ashtanga, and I would consider getting another one, but I don't think it's particularly in the right spirit. Especially the very extravagant tattoos, and really especially the ohms and the lotus flowers, I mean... I don't know really, it just seems a bit odd, doesn't it, you know. We're striving for kind of peace and well being, you know, body and mind and stuff, and yet we're hurting ourselves with tattoos and, I mean, yeah, we're aggrandising our bodies somehow. We wanna look bigger and stronger and tougher and more macho, or whatever. It does seem a bit odd, doesn't it. I've thought about that myself.

To Martin, getting a tattoo, especially an extravagant one, seems counter to central ideas of the yoga philosophy. Getting a tattoo means hurting oneself, and also aggrandising one's body. But even if being counter to the philosophy of yoga, tattoos can be a part of the same self-project as yoga. Getting a tattoo has in the European and American context traditionally been associated with being an outsider or at least being somewhat outside the mainstream of society. Tattoos has been part of the uniform of sailors, motorcycle gangs, punks and other sub-cultural elements and considered as creating or at least stating some kind of distance to society (proper). Although having gained popularity, tattoos regain some of these elements and the bigger and more extravagant the tattoo, the more distance they might be said to create/signify. As such the tattoos on the yogis-to-be might be said to represent their choice to lead different lives geared towards other goals than that most people in Western society. That quite a few have entered the world of yoga from other sub-cultural grouping and by the way of other "alternative" lifestyles (where tattooing is a more "incorporated" element), does not lessen the value of this observation.

Associations with the past might be said to tie into the striving for something more real and authentic. Tattoos might also be personal mnemonics that aids the person carrying them remembering and focus on the intended path, as might tattoos signifying transcendence. Tattoos augment the yoga practitioner's message to the surroundings, and can be seen as symbol of his or hers commitments, as well as the

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

goal that they have set for themselves – be it personal power, authenticity or transcendence (which might of course be part of the same package).

As delving deep into the yoga practice often goes hand in hand with creating some distance to mainstream ideas of value and ambition, tattoos might reinforce and/or stand for the determination to travel a different route in life than most. On the other hand, as both tattoos and yoga are becoming household items in much of the Western world, and are being commoditized (Kopytoff 1986; Bloch & Parry 1989) over much of the world. As permanent markers, tattoos might perhaps be seen as self-branding, or a way of making oneself distinct, both in one’s own and in others’ eyes. Tattooing, as well as the discipline of the yoga practice, might be ways to escape the ambiguousness that seems to be prevalent in modern issues of status and identity. Pain, permanence, and clearness, might be attempts at creating anchorage in a world in drift. Another aspects of the tattoos can be seeing them as permanent clothing, and thus an aspect to style (Hebdige 1999) and communication of identity and societal standing.

As it stands, both yoga and tattoos can become parts in creating the “true” identity of the individual. Both are available on the market, where the creation of the self is the goal and a project that can draw on innumerable religions, cultures and subcultures. To be “taken up” and incorporated as “normal” new phenomena have to be “culturally understandable”. That is, they have to make sense culturally. (Obeyesekere 1981) Yoga is understandable as a part of body- and self-projects – as part of health and exercise regimes, as well as spiritual endeavours.

The seekers who travel to Mysore to do yoga are not just purists on the physical and spiritual eight-fold path to *samadhi*. They, to a large degree, pick, choose and match – some would say mismatch – several path or traditions, and are thus creating their won reality. Such mentality is typical of modern day spiritual practices, which are tailor-made to fit the individuals of experience (Sutcliffe 2000). In this climate, the body is becoming an authoritative source (Heelas 2008; Shilling 1993), as the experience of one’s own body is seen as the only secure knowledge that each of us can experience as (more or less) sure (Schilling 1993). Though even the knowledge of the body is changing, and the body, too, is ambiguous (Shilling 1993), the individual becomes



central. In Lindholm's words, "... the fragmentation of the cosmically ratified premodern universe leaves only the individual as the ultimate object of worship" (Lindholm 2008: 69).

Important as the individual is though, there is also the concern for the environment and, ultimately, the balance and well-being of the whole universe. On the one hand, you are encouraged to listen to your own body and seek what works for you, in particular, since it is hard to access any "universal" truths without going through oneself and one's own body. On the other hand, you are admonished to let go of ego and any utilitarian thoughts; just be and do, and be compassionate – then and only then will the benefits of the practice come to you. The spiritual links of the yoga practice are, thus, connected by way of one's own body and experience of the practice. This approach is also the way pointing to environmental and cosmic connections. Lindholm (2008) writes:

Durkheim said little about the actual substance of the inevitable religion of the individual, but according to the normative premises of emotivism, the crucial *content* of individual personalities is to be found in their experiential capacity for ecstatic connection with an inner emotional truth, hidden beneath the weighty bulk of cultural conditioning, parental restrictions, self-consciousness, and guilt. Like the adrenaline rush that motivates the edgeworker, feelings of heightened reality and communion validate the authenticity of the experience of the real self within. (Lindholm 2008: 69)

The students then, are searching beneath this bulk of cultural conditioning, but at the same time they are being disciplined into yoga. Additionally, what the students experience in the practice has to make sense against the background of the life prior to their encounter with yoga. There has to be some kind of resonance. The feedback they receive from their surrounding must make sense in relation to their own experience of the practice. Whether MPY is authentic yoga or not, the message of yoga resonates well with the modern day emotional and intellectual climate, where each person unfold his or her own reality in the meeting with a fragmented society.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

### Yoga as a spiritual experience and the possibility of changing through personal development

Only the individual religious experience is the safe haven from where one can escape the leaders’ power and experiment with parallel schemas. (Droogers 2006: 86)

Even though terms such as “spirituality”, “religion”, and “God”, are sometimes idiosyncratically defined within the yoga community, many of my informants dub their yoga practice as something akin to a “spiritual path” of self-knowledge, as well as a way of knowing the world. Though, depending on how we define the relevant terms, one way of explaining central aspects of “spirituality” can be as “individual religion”, which still retains the definition of religion presented above. Droogers (2006) says that individual religious experience might be a way of escaping external authorities and be a way of “experimenting with parallel schemas”, and as I have shown yoga can be a powerful ingredient in processes of change, either alone or paired with other agents of change and transcendence. In the stories of change I have presented throughout this thesis, yoga has either been the instigator of change or has been a practice that has curbed and transformed unwanted change – in the form of “detrimental” happenings – into positive change and transformation. Such stories can be termed as “breaking free” or “finding one self”, but either way yoga makes an important difference in the narratives.

The *asana* practice is just a part of something much larger in many of these narratives, and in hindsight even downturns are made sense of in relation to the practice, and where people are today. Many students are telling stories of how everything came together – starting practicing yoga and also coming to Mysore, was meant to be. Martin tells one such story:

You might be interested in this; one of the things that happened... 2001 I started practicing yoga, end of 2001 9/11 happened. I was running a business, a record business. And like all businesses, it took a down-turn after 200... I mean, nobody was selling... other than drinking, I think. That was the industry that did well out 2001, after 9/11. And our business took a huge downturn, it was a small business, operating on the margin already. We lost about 50% of our sales overnight, and we tried to recover throughout October, November, December, January 2002. By about spring 2002 it was obvious that the business wasn’t gonna recover. So the

company went down. And I'd be running it for five and a half years, it'd been everything, you know. I'd put everything into it, it actually made me ill. I lost relationships over it. I put all my money in. And now apparently I was losing everything. But I know for a fact that because of Ashtanga I didn't go down with the business. I remember very clearly when it occurred to me, when I realized that the business was going, fully realized for myself the business was going and everything that I'd work for was basically lost, including my representation in that business. I remember very clearly, realising that I didn't care, and I realised that I've in some ways wished it gone, and it wasn't serving me anymore and I realised that because... No, not even because I had Ashtanga, I realized that as long as I could practice Ashtanga, I would be all right. You know? And whereas the job, the business, had been like my anchor. Now it seemed that Ashtanga was the anchor, and as long as I could practice I didn't actually matter about all the other circumstances. As long as I could practice. So I needed the money to practice, I needed the space to practice, I needed the well-being to practice, I didn't need this job, you know. And so I know for a fact that I would have gone down big time with that business if I hadn't had Ashtanga to hold on to. That was now the interest. The interest wasn't this business, and I wanted it gone, and the day that we went out of business I was just like; thank God for that. Thank God it's gone, what a nightmare. Five and half year nightmare. So that... you know, that's how sort of strong the Ashtanga thing was even at that stage, and I only had been practicing about six months. So then, unfortunately like one of these Ashtanga book, you know, wonderful hippie stories, you know, good luck did come. Soon as that business went, and started pursuing Ashtanga and I started doing a more kind of wholesome work, I kind of had loads of money, loads of opportunities, and, you know, my business had gone, I had split up with my girlfriend, the place I was living, I lost that as well, and I had all this money, so suddenly it's like; hold on: money and freedom? Uhm, yeah! I can't work it out! Yeah.... Hahaha

Ashtanga, after just six months of practice, rescued Martin and became his anchor in life. Ashtanga had become the embracive signifier, the most important schema. The practice made him realise that the life he had led up until then had been a nightmare. It all came together, and with time and money, he had the opportunity to deepen his practice and go to India. I encountered a lot of these stories of change and transformation where Ashtanga played a key role. Many said things like: "I was thinking about going and then the week after I got fired – It was like somebody telling me I should go." Danny had just been made redundant at work and thus was able to go to Mysore. He commented upon this, and said that Mysore for a lot of people was like a site for transmission. Henrietta has just gotten divorced, and selling the house made her able to travel. Salma got fired and did a teacher training. Robert's mother – the only person he was really attached to – died, and thus he was free to go and to

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

explore. Also Axel’s mother died, and he needed to get away for a while, while Ane, his girlfriend, had just finished her education, and still had not found work. Damien just lived between things, and with no job, he sees himself as a free soul. Helge is trying to fight through some mental problems, and is trying to establish himself in a new form. Another person just said: I escaped from problems back home – I will deal with them when I get back. Perhaps these ordeals, crisis of meaning, or social deaths, are the entrance to and transformative experiences that marks these initiates as ready for change, or as seeking some renewed state of being where the previous way of being is left behind or at least changed. Yoga can in these times of crises be presented as a way to ease and end physical and existential suffering. Yoga and India represent something different, alternative ways of being, and something cut of from what used to be. A new layer has unfolded, reconfiguring and giving new meaning to life. Knowledge of being changes overnight.

### The spiritual body in yoga

Largely neglected has been the realm of the body as an experiencing, soulful being, before and beyond its capacity to house icon and metaphor. A less cognate, more sensate treatment now seems needed. (Desjarlais 1992: 29)

The more philosophically and spiritually oriented teachings of the practice gains authority and become significant by being tied to, commenting on and pointing to the often very personal experiences gained during the practice. These can be experiences of oneness, insights in self or environment, flow, concentration, meditation or similar emotions. Although *asanas*, the physical practice, is the (at least seemingly) main focus of the Ashtanga practice, those committed to the practice are also exposed to the other limbs of the practice, especially the *yamas* and the *niyamas*. In this vein the practice flows (or drips) from the more or less purely physical practice, into the rest of the practitioner’s life, lending a religious – in way of depth of significance – hue to the practice, which is exaggerated by the religio-spiritual vocabulary enfolded in yoga.

Yoga as a spirituality of life is on a different level connected to yoga as a social practice, and the practitioners are socialized into an environment governed by a

diffuse set of rules of conduct as well as a certain language for talking about yoga, change and life in general, as I have shown in Chapter 6. In the words of Heelas (2008):

... we are looking at a spirituality 'of' and 'for' *being* truly human; 'of' because it is experienced and understood to emanate from the depths of subjective life, if not life itself; 'for' because of its practicality – its (apparent) ability to make a positive difference to subjective life and the life around us: as well as elsewhere. (Heelas 2008: 17)

Approached from this angle, the physicality of the practice is crucial. Through the practice (at least parts) of the philosophy of yoga is experienced physically to be true and yoga itself is embodied. The body is felt to alter, and the mind is experienced to be changed. These experiences themselves are seen as proof of everything that yoga promises, a stronger, more flexible body, a calmer mind, better concentration etc. That these changes can be claimed to be felt just because they are announced or expected does not alter the fact that they are experienced. In either way, the experience of change proves that yoga works, which further strengthens the belief in yoga, and thus, alters the life-word of the practitioner. As Ingold (2000) asserts, settings of practical activity also work to create dispositions. He writes that

... cultural knowledge, rather than being imported into settings of practical activity, is constituted within these settings through the development of specific dispositions and sensibilities that lead people to orient themselves in relation to their environment and to attend to its features in the particular ways that they do. (Ingold 2000: 154)

The social discourse eclipsing the practice is as such an important factor. The language surrounding the physical exercise is a language much concerned with introspection, change and empowerment. The source of change is the physical practice, and the experience thereof. Through being socialized into the yoga family one is trained to recognize and acknowledge the physical changes that the practise brings, and also to frame these changes in the philosophical or religious language and understanding. Through the practise you will experience to get to know your true and authentic self. You might experience (re-)connection to some original power source, be it God, the Universe, Everything (or Nothingness). You will realise that you are one with the Universal Soul. Practicing opens up the body. These are well rehearsed

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

ways of framing what might be experienced in the practice on the mat, and the practitioner will parallel to learning the Ashtanga sequence, be socialised into the language of the “tribe”, and learn how to recognise in her or his own body the pros and cons of yoga. Part of this language and social knowledge is also yoga’s ability to heal body and soul, and its power to redeem, save and change. The philosophy and practice of yoga “... become a determination or explanation of that world [the world we perceive]” (Merleau-Ponty 2008: ix). The personal experience of and commitment to the yoga practice acts as a turning point in many a life story.

As Heelas says, practice becomes crucial as just being a spiritual being is of little value if this is not experienced:

Practices: to experience spirituality and to put spirituality into practice. Practices: not taken to ‘construct’ the ‘truth’ of what we are through ‘laid-down’ performance (as the likes of Foucault would have it), but experienced as *revealing* the truths of life to *create* life-with-a-difference (as the Romantics would have it). (Heelas 2008: 33)

Heelas (2008) locates spirituality in the depths of life in coining the term spiritualities of life. This spirituality is rooted in personal experiences and introspection and the notion of “God within”. Yoga is easily fitted into this category. Yoga teachers and books encourages being present in the practice, learning from the experience thereof, and not least carrying that experience and the wider aspects of the practice into life also off the mat. Changes are mostly trailed to the practice and what is learned of body and self on mat. Just “understanding” yoga intellectually is impossible, only through practice some inkling of what yoga *is* and can be, can be gained. While “dramatic” happenings might create a need for change, change comes from experience. Yoga is either a source of change inducing experience or is experienced to ease the burden of traumatic episodes, and as such alleviating the change and converting negative upheavals into positive change, as healing the body after a crash, and thus paving the way for an “eye-opening” rather than crippling experience. Yoga can recreate reality, and thus become reality.

Practice reveals the truth. The truth of being is experienced in the practice, as seen in the statements of “it just changed”, “it wasn’t a conscious choice” etc. Through the

experiences of the practice, the truth of life is revealed, and thus, the practice entails changes. Life becomes different and the body becomes changed. As such, reality is unfolded and created in the practice. As evermore aspects of life are enfolded as significant *within* the practice, yoga can be unfolded to embrace reality. Yoga can become a “religion” by being of all-encompassing significance, or a religious practice directed towards “wholeness”. In “modern society”, yoga as a practice, and religions are continuously challenged, though, and I will turn to some of the developments that yoga students find threatening to the “wholeness” and “sanctity” of their practice in the following chapter.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”



## 9: Yoga, authenticity and interchange

The Ashtanga yoga practice, like any yoga practice, is an integrated whole, made up of personal experience, social discourse and word-wide debate of what the other aspects entail and consist of, and all these aspects are enfolded in each other. Yoga as a personal practice is not delimited to just the physical practice of *asana* on the mat every morning, but it can embrace and permeate the whole life of the ambitious *yogi* to be. Yoga as a social practice consists of socially established rules and norms, authorisations and certifications, charismatic students who are living examples of “how it should be done”, as well as the influential guru-disciple lineage. The personal practice is undertaken in a social context, and though everybody has to practice in and with their own bodies, other students and teachers alike influence them all. As for the worldwide debate on yoga, it is hard to pin down what exactly it is, and how it can be delimited. I have already touched upon health and spiritual issues as related to yoga and why it is practiced. One line that can be drawn is around everything written on and about yoga and, in this case in particular, Ashtanga yoga. In these matters, we can also include every picture of *asana*, or people meditating, or anything alluding to some form of yoga or other in other contexts, for example, commercials for cars or bathroom fittings. All these things can have an effect on yoga as a practice if they are deemed relevant to the practice by someone, somewhere. “Relevant” here can mean either something taken in or something rejected, but it is at least reflected upon, albeit briefly, and related to one’s own practice. Thus, one cannot really draw any conclusive line as to where “yoga” stops, as what is interpreted and incorporated as being significant will vary from practice to practice. As I have shown, yoga’s sphere of relevance can be extended indefinitely. Anything and everything ever done and undergone, and thus really experienced (Bohm 1995; Dewey 2005), can and will potentially have an impact on a personal Ashtanga yoga practice. The practice unfolds into all these “levels”.

In this chapter, though, the “worldwide” debate on yoga will connote a more critical, or perhaps more reflexive, view of the practice. Such notions as “global” and “worldwide” might be a bit misleading, as the Ashtanga community is by most means

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

a global community, and thus even the internal debate is global. These debates are concerned with what authentic Ashtanga practice is, the historic development of the practice, the benefits of the practice, and the role of Mysore in the practice today, among a host of other things. These debates also touch upon “yoga” in general, and the pros and cons of “Ashtanga” vis-à-vis other yoga styles and other spiritual and physical “activities”. As we will see, reflection is not only prevalent on the borders of the Ashtanga community and practice, but also within, be it between “hard-liners” and “exercisers”, between “old-school” practitioners and “uncritical followers”, or “acrobats” and “thinkers”. A major issue in the critical discussion within the yoga community is on consumption and the influence of money, which is usually perceived as detrimental to the practice.

### **9.1 What yoga is and should be according to its disciples: The roots, truths and authenticity of yoga**

Here I need to revisit debates on the borders and delimitations of the Ashtanga practice. The Internet is an important arena for these debates and different viewpoints are shared, debated, and distributed through blogs, Facebook entries, and journal and newspaper articles. These sources expand each and every student’s horizon of phenomena that can and will have an impact on their practice. From asking other students at the coconut stand after practice for pointers of how to get up from a backbend (“Lift from the chest, ground your feet, rotate your thighs inwards, don’t raise your head”), or what can be done to ease pain in the wrists in downward dog (“Push the lowest joint of the index fingers down”), and listening to Sharath at the conferences and discussing those topics afterwards, “the whole world” is at hand online, and in other media. The students have their imaginations magnified and can reflect their own experience off a myriad sources available – the scope of their repertoires is widened (Appadurai 1996). People also try to exert their own viewpoints through these media, and as in Mysore, those with a higher social standing by social and cultural capital has a better change of breaking through with *their* version of the truth. In his article ““With Heat Even Iron Will Bend:” Discipline and Authority in Ashtanga Yoga” (2008), Smith among other things writes about different claims as to the role of *tapas* and the establishment of authority in Ashtanga yoga. In commenting on Gregor Maehle’s caution against external heat, which is somewhat

counter to mainstream ideas in Ashtanga practice where room temperatures are often rather high to increase heat and flexibility, he says:

... Maehle's claims number among many divergent claims about the "correct" practice of Ashtanga Yoga, many of which seek to authorize themselves through references to various Sanskrit texts, Pattabhi Jois's teaching, or through an understanding of yoga developed through personal practice. (Smith 2008: 148)

I will look at a few blogs and debated topics, to show how "the gospel" of yoga is spread and debated, and also how these debaters try to substantiate their arguments by various means. Some of the topics spark controversies within the yoga milieu. First I will look to the heated debate that sprung from the New York Times article "How Yoga Can wreck your Body" (Broad 2012a). Afterwards I will look at the Blog "The Confluence Countdown"<sup>185</sup>, and different viewpoints on the value of going to Mysore. This debate is also related to the exchange on changes in the Ashtanga yoga practice. As examples of the debates and negotiations that take place – they are all (at least mostly) symptoms of the ideas of authenticity, search for truths and health and so on. People want clear answers and clean solutions, and it can be hard to swallow that things are not necessarily as easy and clear-cut as they would want them to be. These debates are also symptomatic of what yoga is and can be today, and what role it plays in today's society.

The New York Times, on January 5th 2012, published an excerpt from William J. Broad's book, "The Science of Yoga: The Risks and Rewards" (Broad 2012b) (which was to be published February 2012). The title of the adapted article was "How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body" (Broad 2012a),<sup>186</sup> and it caused a great uproar in various yoga milieus worldwide. Much later (March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012), the topic and Broad's theme reappeared in D2<sup>187</sup> (Hambro 2012), the Friday supplement to the Norwegian newspaper "Dagens Næringsliv", though it made it clear that Broad has a

---

<sup>185</sup> [theconfluencecountdown.com](http://theconfluencecountdown.com)

<sup>186</sup> As of April 8th, 2012, there were 737 comments of this article online at the NYT only.

<sup>187</sup> The online version has a rather blunt and beautiful heading, which is, "Yoga kan gjøre deg tykk og forårsake hjerneslag" – "Yoga can make you thick and cause cerebral strokes" – and can be found at <http://www.dn.no/d2/article2364690.ece>

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

much more positive view of yoga than the NYT article gave the impression of.<sup>188</sup> I picked up on the debate through the several Facebook comments that appeared, most showing the indignation of the yoga-practicing poster. In the article, the focus is on the destructive power of yoga, and it refers to severe injuries and even deaths caused more or less directly by yoga practice. Broad quotes senior yoga teacher Glenn Black, who is well versed in the Iyengar. “Black has come to believe that “the vast majority of people” should give up yoga altogether. It is simply too likely to cause harm” (Broad 2012a). Black himself underwent surgery because “He had developed spinal stenosis — a serious condition in which the openings between vertebrae begin to narrow, compressing spinal nerves and causing excruciating pain” (Broad 2012). Black traces this injury back to too many backbends and heavy twisting. In his work with rehabilitating injuries, Black has also met a lot of yoga teachers who have harmed themselves by doing yoga. To support his argument Broad further remarks that

... a growing body of medical evidence supports Black’s contention that, for many people, a number of commonly taught yoga poses are inherently risky. The first reports of yoga injuries appeared decades ago, published in some of the world’s most respected journals — among them, *Neurology*, *The British Medical Journal* and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. The problems ranged from relatively mild injuries to permanent disabilities. (Broad 2012a)

The medical research traces strokes, neck trauma, compressed vertebra, paralysis and pinched nerves, just to mention a few things, to certain yoga poses, and thus cautions against headstands and other inversions, such as shoulderstand and upward bow. And these are just the most serious cases cited by Broad (2012). The rate of yoga related injuries has been increasing in later years, according to some studies. Broad emphasizes the seriousness and authority of his argument with the fact that

Black is one of the most careful yoga practitioners I know. When I first spoke to him, he said he had never injured himself doing yoga or, as far as he knew, been responsible for harming any of his students. I asked him if his recent injury could have been congenital or related to

---

<sup>188</sup> An even more positive article on yoga, written by Josephine Fairley, also sites medical research on the practice showing its beneficial effects. The article appeared in *The Guardian*, Tuesday May 1, 2012. The article can be found at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/may/01/yoga-benefits-never-too-late>

aging. No, he said. It was yoga. “You have to get a different perspective to see if what you’re doing is going to eventually be bad for you.” (Broad 2012a)

Although Black, as well as a few doctors, medical personnel and a handful of articles from medical journals were Broad’s (2012a, 2012b) witnesses to the truth of the dangers of yoga, Broad – by citing Black – also presented some arguments that should be fairly familiar among yoga practitioners, in general, especially that the modern practice of yoga is too ego- and *asana*-centric:

“Today many schools of yoga are just about pushing people,” Black said. “You can’t believe what’s going on — teachers jumping on people, pushing and pulling and saying, ‘You should be able to do this by now.’ It has to do with their egos.” (Broad 2012a)

The main argument seemed clear, though: Yoga is dangerous and harmful. The response was immediate. I will cite just a few of the many answers that occurred on blogs and in online journals such as Elephantjournal.com, Mindbodygreen.com and in the Huffington post section on Health. I was directed to many of these entries by comments posted on Facebook, which also show the “average” yoga student’s engagement in the debate. The fact that the book had yet to be released at the time the article was published did not slow the commentators down, although, the previously mentioned article in D2 (Hambro 2012) make it clear that Broad’s (2012b) overall take is much in favour of practicing yoga.

Among those who responded to the New York Times (NYT) article was Eddie Stern, founder of Ashtanga Yoga New York (AYNY) and one of Guruji’s senior students. His response was published both at AYNy’s blog (AYNY 2012) and on Huffpost Healthy Living (Stern 2012). Stern (2012), first and foremost, comments on the bias of Broad’s (2012a) article, and, especially, the “sensationalism” of it.<sup>189</sup> Stern does not deny that there are injuries in yoga practice, but he claims that this is not something inherent in yoga, and that the main reason for injuries is overzealousness in students and teachers alike – pushing too hard and wanting too much too soon – which is in line with Black’s claim on pushy modern-day yoga teachers (Broad 2012a). Stern (2012) blames this, at least partly, on the money involved in yoga

---

<sup>189</sup> The “sensationalism” of the article (Broad 2012a) is attested by the more “sombre” approach in the book (Broad 2012b) as a whole.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

today, and also on the lack of proper teacher training. He says that because yoga in America has been "McDona-fied", yoga

... has been reduced from a practice that traditionally demanded dedication, discipline, sacrifice, humility, surrender, love, devotion and self-investigation -- and yes, suffering through rigorous practice -- to something that one can now learn to teach in a weekend. (Stern 2012)

When money becomes an issue, then safety, quality and plain hard and dedicated work are sacrificed. He writes:

A more troublesome underlying cause that leads to injuries while doing yoga, I believe, is the value system that forms the basis of the yoga "industry" in America, which is built largely on economic incentive. Sound cynical of me? As a \$5 billion a year industry, it would be hard to argue that the values traditionally associated with yoga, such as simplicity, humility, and one-pointed focus could somehow coexist un-problematically in the midst of a product-oriented industry. America is good at jumping at opportunities -- and when it comes to making the holy dollar, no cow is too sacred to be sacrificed in the West. (Stern 2012)

Stern (2012) calls for self-examination, better-qualified teachers and temperance. The path of yoga is arduous, and there are issues that are more pressing than getting the next pose.

David Keil (2012) enters the debate from a different angle. After noting that Broad (2012a) basically treats yoga as just another exercise method, he compares statistics of injuries in other sports and exercise regimes to the ones presented in Broad's text. Without going into the details of Keil's (2012) findings, there are relatively few serious injuries in yoga when compared to, for instance, American football, basketball, cycling etc. Like Stern (2012), Keil (2012) also points to the eagerness of some students, and he questions the general Western idea of yoga as therapy. This is one thing that, according to Keil (2012), causes an uproar when somebody says yoga can be injurious. Most yoga practitioners know that you can get injured doing yoga, but the "masses" think of yoga as gentle and therapeutic, therefore, the "sensational" injuries makes people question the practice rather than *how* it is practiced. Avoiding

injuries in yoga practice is the responsibility of both teachers *and* students, and he says:

Safety, safely, safe. It's an illusion. No one can predict what's going to happen to someone, either in a good way or a bad way. The same pose that can heal you can also harm you! The difference is YOU! Sometimes injuries happen unexpectedly, accidentally, and all we can do is make up stories about how it happened and why.<sup>190</sup> (Keil 2012)

His advice on avoiding injuries is to find the best teacher you can, study thoroughly, be aware of what you are doing and how your body reacts – you are the one practicing, the practice manifests in each and everyone of us – practice consistently and breathe.

Suhag A. Shukla esq. (2012) points out that Broad's (2012a) claims about injuries "... are premised on anecdotes about asana, not yoga, and the only thing really getting fat is the gap between the popular understanding of yoga and what yoga really is" (Shukla (2012).

She makes it clear that yoga is really about a spiritual path towards "yoking" – that is, experiencing the Divine within. Yoga is about attaining *moksha*, and is a spiritual system. It certainly is not only about *asana*. She goes on to sketch out the eight limbs of Ashtanga yoga. (Shukla 2012)

Fromberg (2012) lets Glenn Black, the main "eyewitness" in Broad's (2012a) account, get a word in on his own. In this interview, he explains further how and why people injure themselves, and cautions that some people should not do certain poses. He also dispels yoga's – especially concerning *asana* practice – mythical and ancient origins by saying:

Asana was only developed 80 or 90 years ago. Patanjali (author of the ancient yoga sutras) was talking about sitting poses. Headstands weren't done when Patanjali was alive. Asana came from Indian military exercises. Indians are small people next to the British, and they developed a series of calisthenics to make them strong. They were already flexible, and they

---

<sup>190</sup> This view is, of course, also interesting and relevant from a phenomenological and a radical constructivist point of view.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

also wanted to do sitting poses. They named it Ashtanga due to the eight limbs of yoga, and asana is one of them, but just why somebody called it that, who knows why? Those sequences have nothing to do with real Ashtanga yoga, the eight limbs of yoga. (Fromberg 2012)

He further rejects vegetarianism as obligatory for yoga practitioners – “Vegetarianism being essential to doing yoga is a myth. Tibetan yogis are heavy meat eaters” (Fromberg 2012) – and, similar to Stern (2012), ridicules teacher-training courses. He also distances yoga from being just a physical exercise, which, again, is in line with both Keil (2012) and Stern (2012).

Another debate, which surfaced – or rather resurfaced, as it is never far away – just after the NYT controversy, concerns whether going to Mysore to practice at KPJAYI is really worthwhile or not. On March 25<sup>th</sup>, Brostrom (2012) published an article at Elephantjournal.com called “So You Want to Practice Ashtanga Yoga In Mysore”, where she lists five reasons to go, and five reasons to stay away. In this article she mentions the love for the practice as a reason to travel to India. The second reason to go is that you like to be told what to do, and will not react badly to being told when to come in, where to stand, when to finish your practice, and when to go to the finishing sequence. Another sign that you are ready to go is that you are ready to face up to the less desirable aspects of your own ego as the Mysore scene can be rather fierce in that department. Fighting your way into the packed Shala for led-classes it takes patience, self-restraint and a balanced ego not to get caught up in the tumults. According to Brostrom (2012), the chaos of India can be a source for spiritual experiences if you are aware and willing, and these spiritual blossoms can be nurtured on the mat. The fifth reason to go is fresh coconut water. As for the reasons to stay at home, three are rather straightforward. Preferring to drink water straight from the tap, having a job (which makes going to Mysore for a couple of months hard), and being “psyched to work on your six-pack” (Brostrom 2012) are “obviously” wrong reasons to travel to India. The two other reasons are more interesting. If you love getting a lot of attention from your yoga teacher, the Shala is not the place for you. As Brostrom puts it:

With several hundreds of ashtangis flocking to the shala during teaching season, there just isn’t much personal attention to go around. Unless you’re willing to resort to some serious attention grabbing techniques (body paint? pom-poms?) you’ll be on your own for the most part. (Brostrom 2012)



These are, as shown elsewhere, common observations among yoga students in Mysore, as is the last reason to stay home: The desire to be authorised. As the requirements for being authorised are rather vague and changing, going to Mysore to be authorised "... will only get in the way of what could be a subtle and personal transformational experience. If you go, go without expectations" (Brostrom 2012).

Brostrom's (2012) list is not very controversial, but people picked up on it, and the day after (March 26<sup>th</sup>) I received an update from "The Confluence Countdown" called "On not being a zero and not going to Mysore". This post was removed from the blog shortly after, as it had been posted by mistake, but it was replaced on March 27th by another post titled "Mysore then versus Mysore now" (TCC 4) which was a revised edition of the first, but mainly contained the same argument. In the former (and the latter) post Steve (Cahn) expounded upon one of Brostrom's (2012) reasons to not going to Mysore, namely the lack of attention many students experience in the Shala. This piece – or rather these pieces – also clarifies an article he himself wrote a couple of days earlier ("On the question of Mysore, how about chill and just practice?" Posted March 23, 2012 (TCC 2)) on why he does not care about going to Mysore and on how Ashtanga will develop after Guruji's passing. His conclusion about these questions is that we should not stress too much about anything, just "chill out" and it will work itself out. We should just keep on practicing. In the March 27 blog entry, (TCC 4) though, he weaves the argument a bit thicker. Steve's main argument is against the lack of attention given to each student in the Shala. As there are now hundreds of students passing through that space, doing their practice, practitioners are mostly left to their own device, as Brostrom (2012) points out. Steve (TCC 4) compares this to older days when Guruji was teaching. Back then, there was not the humbling experience of being a nobody (which many students today actually laud as a very important lesson). Everybody was somebody in the eyes of Guruji. He goes on:

Guruji was the reason to be in Mysore. The point, now, of being in Mysore seems to be something else. I understand, and appreciate, that there is an amazing array of experiences to be had *today* in Mysore. I'm not discounting them or downplaying them. But I don't see how one of the fundamental experiences of the senior Ashtanga students is possible anymore.

I'm also not discounting Sharath's teaching, including his ability to be there, present, with

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

students for those moments when he’s adjusting them. (TCC 4)

His point is that the Shala has been too successful and is drawing in too many people so that nowadays, the students will not have the same experience as they did “back then”, when there were only a handful students and they lived in Guruji’s house. He muses about going to Maui or elsewhere to study with some master Ashtanga teacher and concludes his (original March 26) entry with: “But going to Mysore and being a “zero?” That’s not really my picture of practicing Ashtanga.”<sup>191</sup>

Neither Bobbie nor Steve, who run “The Confluence Countdown” together, has been to Mysore. Rather, Steve supports his viewpoints through the arguments of both senior and present-day students. He makes it clear that, for him (or rather the two of them), the main teachers – and thus, the authorities in their practice – are to be found among the senior teachers, namely, Tim Miller – who is the main teacher with Jörgen Christiansson – Eddie Stern, Nancy Gilgoff, Richard Freeman and David Swenson. It seems to me that, to the authors of “The Confluence Countdown”, these teachers, who were among the very early Western students of Guruji, are the keepers of the true Ashtanga yoga practice. This can be seen in statements such as,

Wait, you’re saying! Nancy taught on Saturday at the Confluence. True. But — again, this is second-hand via Bobbie — Nancy said the picking of a day off each week by Guruji was arbitrary. So it sounds like we have some freedom to choose a different day off, if we want, and if we want to cite Nancy as a source. (And, probably, if we aren’t going to a shala that enforces Saturdays off.) (TCC 1)<sup>192</sup>

And in turning to Nancy Gilgoff’s insistence on using yoga rugs (TCC 6):

According to Nancy, you shouldn’t be taking time out in the middle of your practice to roll it out, or squirt it with water or anything else that draws away your focus and your breath. And being able to stay balanced on the rug is the point, and will help you build strength.

Also, for what it’s worth, David Swenson in his seminal Ashtanga practice guide, says he

---

<sup>191</sup> The penultimate sentence of the revised version reads: “But going to Mysore among the masses?” (TCC 4)

<sup>192</sup> What seems to be missing here is that, while for Sharath’s students, Saturdays are off, Saraswathi is actually teaching on Saturdays in Mysore, which means that, for her students, Sunday is the weekly day off.

prefers the rug on top of mat arrangement so your feet are touching a natural material. (TCC 6)

Thus, it becomes clear that these seminal teachers have a huge impact on the way these bloggers understand and reflect upon their practice.

In turning to these senior students of Guruji, and in being critical of the way the Shala is being run today, Bobbie and Steve, in their blog, stirred up an interesting debate in the Ashtanga community. They are also weighing in on the question concerning authenticity in the Ashtanga practice by claiming that there is something closer to the *real* practice when fewer students are practicing under the closer guidance of a present and “attending” teacher. In an answer below the “Mysore then versus Mysore now” entry (TCC 4), Nick comments on a few problematic aspects of the article. First, he comments on the fact that the authors of the text have never practiced with Guruji, nor Sharath, nor Saraswathi, which does not figure in their account at all. He himself has practiced with Sharath and Saraswathi and does not “... make assumptions or comparisons based on mere hearsay: an entirely unyogic activity” (TCC 4: comments).

He goes on to praise Sharath and Saraswathi’s abilities in being there for the students, and especially, in knowing where in the practice every single one of them is at any certain time (despite the high number of students). He also applauds the new system where authorised students assist in the teaching. He finishes by insisting that

... the romantic, sentimental notion about being at the old Shala and being instructed with a few other practitioners or staying at Guruji’s house etc. is misguided and frankly irrelevant. [T]hese times are over: Guruji is no longer with us. The time is always now. (TCC 4: comments)

He, thus, points to his own experience of being in the Shala, as opposed to Steve, whose argument is “... based on [his] experience with many of these teachers and the many stories of Mysore from the past — and from the present” (TCC 4; Steve’s answer to Nick’s comment). Thus, they both try to boost their arguments by referring to their own experience and their (experienced and senior) teachers, but for different ends. “The Confluence Countdown” followed up their argument with a new blog post

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

on March 28. The heading was, “My final word on Mysore and Ashtanga (Jai Rama!)” (TCC 5). In it, Steve admits to being too easily sucked into the arguments on Mysore and the ultimate sources to the Ashtanga practice, and finally withdraws from a debate that he, too, sees as “unyogic”. The debate does not deepen his practice, and that is ultimately the goal of the blog. Mysore is, as he says, “a juicy story”, and people out there in the “cybershala” (TCC 5) are only too eager to discuss the topic.

The blog does not fully let go of the question of authenticity and origin though, and just a few days later (April 5<sup>th</sup>) they post an entry called “The oldest Ashtanga vs. more ‘authentic’ Ashtanga” (TCC 8). In this text Steve dives into the question whether the oldest versions of Ashtanga necessarily are the most authentic, and he writes:

This oldest versus more authentic repeatedly comes up in off-mat discussions of the practice. Did those first Westerners (or an Indian even earlier) experience a more authentic Ashtanga? Seemingly not. We’ve heard from Nancy Gilgoff how Guruji’s Western students, in particular, were the “research” for his augmenting and developing the practice. (TCC 8)

To me, this seems a bit counter to the previous arguments on Mysore that I presented from their blog, but here, he goes on to muse about the ongoing development of the Ashtanga practice, and when, if ever, the most authentic Ashtanga was practiced.

All these questions are tied to ideas of the “correct” method, authenticity, and change, in yoga in general and Ashtanga in particular. As Smith (2008) comments on the practice in the KPJAYI Shala:

Here, as often seems to be the case in transnational Ashtanga Yoga, interpretation of the ways that yoga is taught and explained in Mysore allow for various interpretations – and sometimes profound misinterpretations – by students and teachers. (Smith 2008: 155)

Although most practitioners have some notion of what the “correct” method in yoga is, change is not necessarily deemed negative, as we have seen, as the “research” into Ashtanga yoga must also imply that there are possibilities for “... augmenting and developing the practice” (TCC 8). Which changes are judged desirable, though, varies among practitioners, and opinions are based which style of yoga they favour, who

their teachers are, what they have read, who they have talked to, and of course their own practice. In the “cybershala” (TCC 5), temperatures run high when certain issues are brought forth.

Without going too far into all the relevant debates, many of them circle around topics related to those mentioned above, namely what is the most authentic practice – and these exchanges takes place both within (AN1, AN2) and between (TCC 9) different systems of yoga – changes in yoga and specific systems thereof (look to “The Confluence Countdown” for examples), and also what *is* yoga. The latter debate is often circling around the *asana* (as physical exercise) vs. “more holistic” views of yoga (as spiritual/religious practice), and how whatever it is should be practiced (e.g., Budig 2012; Israel 2012; Lawson 2012). To put it bluntly, is yoga a tool getting a great body or for being released from the ego (and eventually attaining *moksha*)? Another related debate is whether yoga can be trans-located in a Western context at all, or if it is, rather, a Hindu religious practice (Godkin 2012; Nanda 2011a, 2011b; Shukla 2012; Venkataraman 2011a, 2011b).<sup>193</sup> Many of these discussions are also related to the topic of the commercialization of yoga, and before moving on I will look at one more debate that is taking place within the Ashtanga yoga community, namely on the establishment of Jois Yoga, and the opening of the Jois Yoga studio in Greenwich, Connecticut. This debate was partly centred on an article in Vanity Fair in April 2012, titled “Who’s Yoga Is It Anyway?” (McLean 2012)<sup>194</sup>.

---

<sup>193</sup> The references given in this paragraph are but a few of the references that could be given in these regards, and as can be observed most of these are very recent entries. In the articles referred to – and online in general – there are abundant “threads” that can be traced for any of these topics. The comments posted below the articles also show the engagement of yoga practitioners on these matters. A quick search on “Yoga” on mindbodygreen.com, elephantjournal.com, huffingtonpost.com or nytimes.com will reveal several articles that are related to one or more of these topics. An interesting observation that there is regrettably not room to investigate fully in this thesis, is the vast number of articles on these pages that are devoted to dieting – which is not so odd – and especially sex(-uality) – sometimes related to yoga. As a preliminary hypothesis I think that the fact that these are mainly American sites is important. In the face of traditional American puritanism, a more “natural” relationship to sex, body and nudity is tied to the “knowing-thy-self” and your body ideology/philosophy of modern yoga. To have a healthy relationship to oneself and one’s body is also to have a more natural and healthier relationship to one’s own sexuality.

<sup>194</sup> That the article is in the business section is interesting in itself as many yoga practitioners bemoan the impact money and “commercialism” have on the practice, and though the title is “Who’s Yoga Is It Anyway?” the heading on the browser window appears as “Yoga-for-Trophy-Wives Fitness Fad That’s Alienating Discipline Devotees” a sentence that neatly sums up parts of the controversy.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

The article is interesting in several ways, among other things in drawing up the history of Ashtanga yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois, and how it came to be established as a popular brand of yoga in the USA. It also sketches up some changes, like the increased popularity, the money-issues and the impact of the “Western mind” that are viewed with less favour among most practitioners. The story main story in *Vanity fair* (McLean 2012), though – or at least the most controversial one – is on Sonia Jones, wife of a hedge fund billionaire, who together with Sharath and Saraswathi is responsible for opening the Greenwich shala, and the debate the opening has caused in the Ashtanga milieu. The project is presented thus:

This will be his wife’s [Sonia Jones’] fourth Jois studio, or “shala” in yoga lingo, and that’s only part of her far-flung project. In partnership with Pattabhi Jois’s daughter and grandson and a friend, San Diego-based entrepreneur Salima Ruffin, she’s also launched a Jois line of yoga clothes, and she is setting up charities to bring yoga to everyone, from charter schools in Florida to villages in Africa. Ruffin likes to say that Sonia is the “Mother Teresa of yoga.”

Sonia Jones, as she likes to be called, is devoted to yoga not for the reason most American devotees are—the attainment of physical perfection, with maybe a little spiritual bliss tossed in—but because she thinks it restored her to health. (McLean 2012)

As the story goes, Sonia came into Ashtanga yoga because she after bearing four children had a ruptured disk in her back. An acquaintance told her that Pattabhi Jois’ brand of yoga was the only thing that would help her. The article goes on to present his method as a physically demanding and solitaire practice fitting a certain type of rather driven personality, for whom it can have “an addictive quality”. (McLean 2012) After listing some of the method’s celebrity adherents, McLean (2012) again turns to Sonia, saying:

These days, Sonia Jones, at 44, is a walking advertisement for the physical benefits of Ashtanga. She’s slim, but in a toned way rather than an annoyingly skinny one. Blonde and tan, she is warm and ebullient, more earthy Australian than uptight Greenwich grande dame. Every morning, she does her practice in a sunny studio—decorated with pictures of Jois and his family—in her Greenwich house, overlooking Long Island Sound. She’s so committed to Ashtanga that, if you’re in her life, you have to do it, too. (McLean 2012)

The controversial issue though is the Jois Yoga enterprise, where she as the article puts is involved “... with Guruji’s heirs and their attempt to codify his teachings...” (McLean 2012) The rest of the piece is about the fear, insecurity and bewilderment the establishment of Jois Yoga has created. Some feel that it represents a commercialization of a practice they have invested much time and energy in, and that the “codification” represents a threat to the living, evolving tradition, or on the other hand, a (further) step away from the legacy of Guruji. It might be the fear that Sonia Jones is bypassing a lot of senior teachers and students, and that she is threatening their relationship to the Jois family. Though co-founders, how Sharath and Saraswathi fit into the whole scheme of things is not entirely clear either. Other well-established teachers, like Lino Miele, see the whole thing as a play for power and something they will have no part in. Disregarding the changes Guruji himself made in the practice and in the sequence in his own lifetime – and the history of yoga as presented by, among others, Mark Singleton, who “... has cast some doubt on how important physical postures were in ancient yoga” (McLean 2012, and also De Michelis 2005, 2008; Singleton 2005, 2008, 2010; Sjoman 1999) – others, again, see Jones’ move as threatening the authenticity of the Ashtanga method and sequence, which itself is part of Ashtanga’s allure. There are also those who wonder why the Jois Yoga had to open a studio in Encinitas, California, so close to Tim Miller’s studio, and, in general, they are flabbergasted about the way Miller has been treated. Some ponder that it might be a scheme to uproot some of the teachers who were closest to Pattabhi Jois. This makes the whole story a story that is also about the *parampara*, the lineage of teachers. Mclean states:

For those who started going to Mysore when Sharath was just a kid, it’s hard. “Sharath is not a teacher to me,” says one old-school practitioner. “He is barely even a peer to me.” Sharath has also spread some fear and discontent by instituting new rules about what people have to do to be “authorized” by the Jois family to teach Ashtanga—or to keep their existing authorization. (McLean 2012)

The changes in the requirements for getting authorized, have alienated some of the old-timers, and some have also been taken off the list of authorised teachers (see also AN 1, AN 2). Part of the fear in the “older segments” of the Ashtanga community is also connected to the question of how the practice will evolve after Guruji’s passing

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

in 2009. They wonder how Sharath, who does not have the same qualifications as Guruji did, will – and if he will be able to – uphold Guruji’s legacy. Sharath and Saraswathi, for their part, claim that they are just trying to reclaim Guruji’s legacy before the West ruins it. (McLean 2012) As such another question in this is; what can and cannot be changed? Is it ok to change – or some would say create – the “bureaucracy” surrounding the Ashtanga yoga, but not to modify the sequence? Some of the senior students of Guruji, today well known teachers in their own right, like Nancy Gilgoff and Tim Miller, modifies the sequence to accommodate students who needs it, and points out that even Guruji did this. (McLean 2012)

But for Sonia Jones, changing it up is akin to heresy. After all, it worked for her exactly as advertised. “I just want to honor Guruji and take care of this family,” she says. “I love them.” (McLean 2012)

Although Jones’s intentions might be pure, many Ashtanga practitioners have reacted to the way she has gone about with things. The Jois Yoga, which also carts yoga apparel, is by many deemed as too commercial, and the launching just about one year after Guruji’s death, was too early for others.

The development is still underway, and Jois Yoga is still young, so it’s hard to tell how everything will turn out. What is certain is that there is a rent in the Ashtanga community that, while perhaps not fully caused by these happenings, has been made more visible and pronounced by them. Old and new students alike make their voices heard, though some are reluctant to voice their views too loudly since they are afraid it might get them in trouble or they just deem the whole thing “unyogic”. The Vanity Fair article (McLean 2012) is at least illustrative of the commitment and emotions that run deep in Ashtanga circles, and the article was spread widely on Facebook.

“The Confluence Countdown” commented briefly on the article in their entry March 31<sup>st</sup> (TCC 7), and wrote a short piece on the opening of the Connecticut shala, April 8<sup>th</sup> (TCC 10). In the latter blog entry, they posted what seemed to be a press release from Jois Yoga titled “New Ashtanga studio is poised to reinvent yoga in Greenwich.” In the light of the debate presented above it is especially interesting to



note the use of the word “reinvent” in the heading, and the last paragraph, which reads:

This ventures [sic.] marks the beginning of what Jones and Jois family hope is the continued expansion of Ashtanga and Jois Yoga into the US market. As Yoga has grown in popularity over the last few decades and proliferated into the lives of Americans, The Jois family feel that now is the time to further spread the spiritual ideas and practices of Puttabhi [sic.] Jois and Ashtanga yoga. (TCC 10)<sup>195</sup>

In the eyes of the author of the blog entry, the use of the term “US market” seems to cast a “commercial” light on the whole venture. The latest news on the Tudor-Jones couple by April 12, was: “Sonia Jones (...) and her husband, Paul Tudor Jones, are set to donate \$12 million to establish a Contemplative Studies Center at the University of Virginia.” (Cahn 2012; TCC 11, TCC 12)

These news also created some ruckus in both yoga circles in general, and in the Ashtanga yoga “family” in particular, as the comments on *The Confluence Countdown* (TCC 11) suggest. As a few of them put it: “I’m struggling with my non-judgement” (TCC 11). Interestingly one of the commentators also indicates that John Campbell, who is also a teacher at Jois Yoga, will take up a position at University of Virginia (TCC 11).

All these opinions show how personal the practice is, while at the same time influencing and being influenced by the wider debate. The arguments, opinions and responses of Eddie Stern, David Keil, Glenn Black, Bobbie Allen and Steve Cahn (the authors of “*The Confluence Countdown*”), Sonia Jones and also, William J. Broad – who also practices yoga – and the others, who partake in the debates on the Internet, are founded upon their own embodied experience of yoga practice. Broad himself had suffered injury while doing yoga when he sought out Black, who is renowned for his rehabilitative work with (yoga) injuries (Broad 2012a, 2012b).<sup>196</sup> Such debates as

---

<sup>195</sup> As Steve of “*The Confluence Countdown*” notes, the link he presents to this press release is dead, but he claims that the text – misspellings and all – is as he found it. The [sic]’s are mine.

<sup>196</sup> This argument – about the foundation in own practice – can off course also be made about Smith, Nevrin, Strauss, Singleton, and others – myself included. There are many scholar practitioners in the yoga fold, and I think we all, whether consciously or not, draw on our own experience of the practice when we sit down to write about “yoga” (whatever we understand by that term).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

those presented above, broaden the scope of what the yoga students and practitioners can consider as relevant to their own practice. Questions of authenticity, moral conduct, money and commercialisation, just to mention a few, have an influence on choosing a teacher, where to practice, and how to interpret reasons for and effects of practicing. Choosing to practice with a teacher who is mainly interested in the “spiritual” aspects of yoga rather than a strictly physically oriented teacher – a choice that of course is founded upon the general inclination of the student in the first place – can change or strengthen certain notions, and make up very different practices, though it is the same sequence of postures that is done. The significance of the practices can be divergent, though the appearance is similar.<sup>197</sup>

The questions presented in the debates above relate to the “larger” topics of tradition and change in yoga practice in general. Giddens (1990) catches a paradoxical aspect of these seemingly dichotomous notions when he explains the reflexivity of modern social life:

... justified tradition is tradition in sham clothing and receives its identity only from the reflexivity of the modern.

The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character. (Giddens 1990 38)

Giddens (1990) argues that reflexivity is an inherent part of modern life, and that transformation in the modern era is different from change in “truly” traditional societies since though not resisting change as such, there are in such societies few markers by which change can be made meaningful. Importantly in the case of the yoga community’s debates, both the “traditionalists” – who yearn for the ways and days of Guruji and a handful dedicated practitioners (or even further back) – and those who roll with the punches – and sees change as inevitable and “natural” – partake in the examination of and reflexivity surrounding the practice, and thus in the alteration thereof.

---

<sup>197</sup> Another topic of debate in yoga, which is not confined to the Ashtanga yoga community, that could have been looked into is the question of property rights and copyright issues in relation to *asana*, *asana* sequences, and yoga knowledge (e.g., Srinivas 2007).

On January 1, 2012 Eddie Stern posted – below the Huffpost article (Stern 2012) that responded to the NYT’s claim that yoga can wreck your body (Broad 2012a) – this answer to a girl who questioned the authority on which he spoke in his answer to Broad’s article:

Hi Rebekah, starting yoga in the 1980’s doesn’t make me authentic by any measure - any time someone begins yoga and connects to themselves in a way that is new for them makes their experience authentic. The experience of yoga seems to be timeless; that is, any one can enter the space that practice can open up - but the landscape of products and commercialization has snowballed in the past 10 years - even in the past 5 - and though it has its positive side, it also brings a lot of obscuration with it. Anyway, as my teacher used to say, ‘Let it be’ - things happen, things change - I understand that and don’t mind. But the NYT article provoked a sort of nostalgia in me, and that is the place I was writing from. So, holier than thou? I hope not. And Starbucks, good coffee? That’s a topic for an entirely different set of disagreements! :-)  
Best, Eddie (Stern 2012: comments)

Though Stern, here, makes an important point about authenticity and experience, which resounds with many of my previous arguments on unfolding a personal practice, he also touches upon the commercialisation and potential problem of obscurity that might result from it. So what, then, is characteristic of the more critical assessments of “modern mans” relationship to the “sacred and ancient” practice of yoga? As I have shown at various points in this thesis, much of these observations have to do with ego building and more physically oriented aspects of the practice, which have become important attractions for modern-day practitioners, and which are bemoaned by different authorities of yoga like Stern (2012), Keil (2012), Liberman (2008) and Glenn Black (Fromberg 2012) alike. Most of the debates I have discussed above are related to the question of what “authentic” yoga is, and how yoga can be threatened by change by “Western” influx into its ancient domain. In the next part, I will turn to yoga in what can be termed “modern consumer culture”, which relates to Eddie Stern’s (2012) fears in the latter quote. In viewing yoga in and as a consumer culture, I will also venture into the appeal that yoga has in the global market today.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## 9.2 Yoga in and as a culture of consumption: Consuming the authentic?

For eating is an act of self-identification, as is all consumption. Proteins and calories aside, consumption, the libidinous half of social reproduction, is a significant part of the differential definition of social groups and individuals. The act of identification, the engagement of the person in a higher project, is in one sense an act of pure existential authenticity, but to the degree that it implies consumption of self-defining symbols that are not self-produced but obtained in the market-place, the authenticity is undermined by objectification and potential decontextualization.\* Thus, while engagement authenticates, its consumption de-authenticates. (Friedman 1994: 104. \* Footnote omitted)

Many of the yoga debates taking place in the “cybershala”, as Steven Cahn of “The Confluence Countdown” (TCC 5) denotes it, are directly or indirectly, concerned with the relationship between (authentic) yoga and money or *the* market, and this relationship is what I will turn to here. It should be clear by now that, many yoga practitioners bemoans what they perceive as the commercialisation of yoga. All consumption is self-identification, though, and it is vital in defining differences both between groups and individuals, as has been shown in dealing with food and dietary habits among the aspiring yogis. Consumption can perhaps more “philosophically” be a way of enfolding (aspects of) the world – e.g., what is consumed – onto and into the body/bodied self. As such Friedman (1994) points to a paradox, as identification through “engagement of the person in a higher project” is fostering authenticity, while consumption of symbols obtained in the marketplace de-authenticates. This is surely problematic in the field of yoga, which “Simply put, (...) is the discipline whereby one attains, or gets progressively closer to, *mokṣa* (or *nirvāṇa*)” (De Michelis 2008: 19).

Since yoga today is being marketed – and is used in marketing other consumer goods – some tensions have become evident in the practice. Instead of dispelling ignorance, Friedman (1994) suggests that objectification and decontextualisation will rather lead to confusion, which in yoga, and mostly also elsewhere, is held as a source for suffering. A paradox that can be discerned in this is that even a practice that sets out to end suffering and lead the way to *mokṣa* and the truth of self, can be a source for confusion and pain when it is objectified and sold at the global identity market. There are many students both in Mysore and elsewhere who express worry about the way

the practice of is developing worldwide, as was made clear also in the discussion on Jois Yoga above.

When writing about yoga as a culture of consumption, there are at least three things that are important to keep in mind. First there is yoga in consumer culture, that is; what can be called consumption of yoga (or yoga as a commodity). Secondly there is the consumption of other goods that are in some way or the other connected to the yoga practice, be it clothing, food or other commodities; this can be denoted yoga as a consumer culture, or practice. Tying into both of these, yoga imagery is also used to sell a wide range of items that have little or no relation to yoga as a practice or philosophy. Thus, yoga has an impact and invokes something beyond the circle of strong adherents. This is the third important inroad to yoga and consumption.

In short, these three categories can be termed as follows: i) yoga as a commodity; ii) commodity artefacts that are connected to yoga practice; iii) commodities that are connotated to yoga or yoga practice. This trisection is a division between categories and sub-classes of ‘use-value’ as established in Marx’ theory of capital, which is presented in *Das Kapital* (Marx 2001, *Volume I*, Ch. 1 (English translation))<sup>198</sup> and related works.

‘Use-value’ denotes phenomena (material objects, things, as well as immaterial services) having anticipated ‘utility effect’ (*directly* as ‘means of consumption’, or *indirectly* as ‘natural substances’ or as ‘means of production’). This trisection categorisation, which will be applied in the following, implies a *parallel* division between *commodities* when the category of ‘exchange-value’ is implied in addition to the categories of ‘use-value’. ‘Exchange-value’ occurs only when a ‘use-value’ is *exchanged* with another ‘use-value’, where the *proportion of quanta* of the ‘use-values’ involved in this exchange indicates the *size* of the two (equal) ‘exchange-values’. When *plural* ‘use-values’ become exchanged with the *same* ‘use value’ object, the ‘exchange-value’ of the first ones are denoted ‘*price*’ and said object is denoted ‘*money*’. In Marx’ terminology, ‘*commodity*’ denotes the *combination* of ‘use-value’ and ‘exchange-value’ as the two ‘*factors*’ of ‘commodity’. Far from *all*

---

<sup>198</sup> See also Johansen 1991. See Marx (1968) for German edition used for cross-reference.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

‘use-values’ are tied to ‘exchange-value’, even in modern capital society, and nor does ‘exchange-value’ have to occur in all human history as the *dominant* form of distribution of produced ‘use-values’, since, in the terminology of Marx, ‘exchange’ (having ‘*money*’ as its main sub-category) is only *one* form among possible forms of distribution (connected to different ‘*modes of production*’). From the perspective of ‘use-value’, there is no necessity for it to be tied to ‘exchange-value’, while from the perspective of ‘exchange-value’, there *is* a necessity that it has to be tied to ‘use-value’. Thus, from the last perspective, tied to the *specific* mode of distribution, exchange, and its underlying *specific* mode of *production*, ‘commodity production’, ‘use-value’ is subordinated to and ‘*subsumed*’ under ‘exchange-value’. ‘Commodity production’ is constituted by ‘mutually independent private labours’ as contrasted to mutually dependent and coordinated ones. Further, in Marx’ theory the essence (*Wesen*) that unfolds into ‘exchange-value’ is denoted ‘value’ which is argued to have ‘labour time’ as its basic constituent denoted ‘value substance’. Thus, in Marx’ theory the contradiction between the two factors of the commodity, ‘exchange-value’ and ‘use-value’ is an apparent manifestation (*Erscheinung*) of the deeper contradiction between ‘value’ and ‘use-value’, where the concept ‘value’ is tied to the historic specific *form* of economy denoted ‘exchange’. When ‘exchange’ becomes quite generalized, corresponding to evolution of ‘commodity production’, with the transition to ‘*wage labour*’ as the crucial step, the resulting economic system is denoted the ‘capitalist mode of production’ which has money yielding more money as its ‘universal formula’, with connected flows of labour time embodied in commodities. In Marx’ theory, the subsumption and subordination of ‘use-value’ becomes much more radical and far-reaching with this transition to the system of capital, where ‘value’ itself becomes degraded to static elements inside the overarching cybernetic *process* of ‘capital’ production, circulation and reproduction. Marx describes the concept (*Begriff*) of ‘capital’ as ‘self-processing value’ and ‘supra-gripping (*übergreifende*) subject’ for the evolutionary dynamics of the ‘capitalist mode of production’. Marx’ theory of capital argues that this is a very forceful dynamic, with its ‘interior workings’ camouflaged and twisted in the manifold appearances of these workings, and that this dynamic also has a number of significant implications for ‘use-value’ production, innovation and consumption, as well as for the make-up of ‘objective thought forms’ (*objective Denkformen*) in the minds of economic actors.

Simply put, when ‘use-value’ aspects are impregnated or indirectly influenced by ‘exchange-value’ this has a social impact, and more ‘use-value’ aspects tend to become influenced during the course of development of the system of capital. Whatever the merit of Marx’ and some other theorists’ analyses of this impact, though, there may simultaneously be *some* opposite movements, when we analyse particular cultures or sub-cultures dominated by the capitalist mode of production. In general, society and culture are never *completely* subsumed under the forms of capital, a basic point made by Marx himself, and a necessary condition for his hope and efforts to terminate the ‘capitalist mode of production’ in favour of a ‘communist mode of production’ run by a radically different economic dynamic. Such opposing movements may try to shelter, modify or adjust ‘use-values’, which are *not* subsumed by or aligned with money relations, by preserving or establishing barriers against economic spheres governed by money transactions. In short, with regard to our context, many aspects of yoga or yoga practice (or related “items”) have been impressed by ‘exchange-value’ and are being exchanged for, primarily, money, and this creates a tendency to impress even more aspects. However, as we have seen, there is also a tendency, or a pressure, to keep certain aspects away from the money sphere, focusing instead on the “purity” of ‘use-values’. When I venture further onto the topic of commoditisation in yoga, it is worth noting that it has a different impact on the three categories, and that the third category – commodities that are connotated to yoga or yoga practice – is less clear-cut, more vague and indistinct than the others. This last category, as such, seems interesting since it is telling of how yoga is perceived and of what kinds of things, entities, characteristics and attitudes are associated with yoga and yoga practice.

The popular image of yoga that is created by advertising is influential in shaping peoples’ notions of the practice, and the three ways of viewing yoga related to consumption are interconnected. When writing about yoga *the product*, i.e., yoga as a commodity, there has to be some focus on what it is in the concept that appeals to people, and what people think they will gain from doing the practice, and of course whether yoga lives up to those expectations. Another interesting question is whether these images and ideas are the *same* as those that make yoga sell *other* products. What does yoga tell potential buyers of these products? What is it that yoga sells? What

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

products are bought and consumed by yoga students, and why? Does the perceived commodification of yoga – both making yoga a commodity and yoga related to other commodities – *transform* the practice and those practicing?

Many share the concern of money's impact on the practice, but there are also those who see the marketing and consumption of yoga as an inescapable evil. Modern Yoga (De Michelis 2008) is by now a well-established phenomenon in Western societies as well in the global consumer markets, but some still have the belief that authentic yoga can be achieved in our modern day and age, and that it can have a positive effect. Liberman (2008) writes that “We do not live in an ascetic age, but the asceticism of yoga can be instructive; somehow, its practice must be introduced into the modern yoga studio instead of lines of yoga wardrobe.” (Liberman 2008: 113)

Liberman (2008) promotes the asceticism of yoga as instructive, and he promotes what to him are the authentic aspects of the practice. He also echoes a topic that several of my informants spent time mulling over. As Greta said in commenting upon the selection – and price tags – of yoga apparel at her home town studio: “I wish some of the teachers would actually say that it doesn't really matter what brand of clothing we wear when practicing, and perhaps not be so brand conscious themselves.”

### **Yoga's economic appeal: What it tells and why it sells**

The new cultural intermediaries like, academics, intellectuals, and artists typically invest in education and culture: they effectively adopt a learning mode towards life, yet often display the self-consciousness of the auto-didact, who is moving within the social space. They tend to be fascinated by identity, presentation, appearance, and the cultivation of a lifestyle with their models taken from intellectual and artistic circles. (Featherstone 1991 152)

Although it is still surrounded by some mystic notions and an aura of hippies and middle-aged aunties draped in purple chanting “Om”, it seems that most people today have some notion of what yoga is. Superstars such as Madonna, Sting<sup>199</sup>, Gwyneth

---

<sup>199</sup> Sting was attending the opening of Jois Yoga in Greenwich, for example (TCC 13).



Paltrow, Willem Dafoe<sup>200</sup> and Natalie Portman, and a bunch of others, have helped to give yoga a lot of attention and have probably brought a lot of people to the practice. Along with the growth in numbers of practitioners, there has been a growth in the numbers of yoga studios and products targeting aspiring yogis. There are, of course, mats, clothing, blocks, belts, bags and other objects directly linked to the actual practice, but there are also food products, music, massage oils and nutritional supplements that are not directly related to the practice, but that tie into the more general lifestyle and philosophy of yoga. Even further removed from the actual practice, there are now diapers, bathroom fittings, spa products, tampons and a number of other products, featuring yoga (in some form) in their commercials. In these, yoga is pictured either as a form of working out as part of an active lifestyle where freedom of movement is required (diapers and tampons) or as a calming activity (bathroom fittings and spa treatment). Yoga bags are even featured in car commercials (this car is roomy and fit for an active lifestyle).

Yoga sells for at least three reasons. For one thing, the superstars mentioned above lend certain glamour to it. Secondly, most yoga practitioners are people of at least some economical power. Thirdly, yoga is not just the practice; it is also a philosophy and it is tied to a whole lifestyle. Actually, two significantly different lifestyles can be perceived as related to yoga. One is the jet set, glamorous lifestyle of the superstars where yoga is perceived to be the workout of choice, the life of the rich and beautiful. The second is the alternative lifestyle of the hippies, rooted in a back to basics and nature idea of origin and authenticity. One relates to the hectic, big city life where stressing down and working out is vital, and the other, to the simple (hippie) life of the organic farm, where the body is a temple. They meet in the healthy and, therefore, beautiful body of organic and fresh food, that has a sense of youth and energy. I think that both of these alternative lifestyles are part of the attraction of the yoga practice and that, although they are very different, they blend in the public mind. In a time where the youthful body is a cultic icon to be strived for by any means, be it knife or exercise, anything offering a solution is embraced, and yoga comes as a full package of exercise and philosophy for those who want it. In a time that it is being claimed that the West is in desperate need of spiritual guidance, yoga seems to offer a

---

<sup>200</sup> Paltrow and Dafoe are featured in the film “Ashtanga, NY – a yoga documentary” (2003), directed by Caroline Laskow and Mary Wigmore.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

philosophy for life as well as physical practice, and, as such, it becomes a powerful associative tool in the marketing of a wide variety of products. It might be this kind of double associative power of yoga that is seen in “Yoga Journal” – a lifestyle magazine on yoga – that is on one hand, endorsing “Easy living” and on the other, is packed with advertisements for a wide variety of products, for instance, the “environmental friendly” Ford Fusion Hybrid.

Yoga can be seen as a rather exclusive product. Going to yoga classes is quite expensive (compared to a gym), and yoga is still a bit exotic. The “mythical” aspect of yoga, with its “spiritual” and “transcendent” associations as well as its not too well-defined and delimited “application” might play in the imagination of people, and in itself lend a certain appeal. In the yoga bag there is a wide variety of “good”: Exercise, arcane knowledge, spirituality, body/mind interface, body consciousness, fitness, stress relief, and a pop-icon appeal (exclusiveness), which even makes yoga have a revitalisation in India, as Martin notes:

It seems doesn't it that, it's come almost full circle because it seems that the interest that the Westerners have had in yoga has made Indians again interested in yoga. I mean, this is just a very small example; my landlady, she's a young woman, a few years ago - I've always lived in the same house - a few years ago she asked, I think it was my flatmate, not me: “Would you show me... This is the yoga that Madonna does, right? Would you show me some of it? I'm getting a bit fatty, would you show me some of it?” It's like, because Madonna does yoga, and because Sting does yoga, and so on, these kind of über-fit superstars, you know. And the Indians are aspiring now after this kind of American, Westernised, to a certain extent middle class way of life. And yoga is quite hip in India. It's escaped from the realms of something that mystics in the mountains do and children do in school, and it's now something... It's a hip form of exercise, you know. So it seems that we've had... We've helped bring it back in some ways.<sup>201</sup>

---

<sup>201</sup> Paula shared the idea of bringing yoga back to India, although her emphasize was a bit different:

But the Indian... the Indian tradition of yoga has been lost a lot. Very few kept it. It was very militaristic, it was very hard. Indian people can be very hard. And it missed balance, so that is why it was needed to get out and to be more... yeah, get balance in female and male, and that has been now polished. So yeah, very different ways to approach it. Also one thing, which is definitely needed and which is definitely part of India is the devotion, the *bhakti*. (...) [Westerners practicing yoga] are already having a big impact. It is already, I think, all those practices having a very big impact everywhere. Even now it's coming back to India, so it had to go away of India to come back. So it's growing. I think it had to go out of India first, so Western[ers] have helped actually to give. And I figure it is now finally many different lineages are coming back together and there the time of separation will definitely end soon. I

Yoga fits the bill when it comes to spiritual longing, striving for fitness and the right body shape, the need for a time-out of stressful modern living and the quest for individualism. The plasticity of yoga can make it anything.<sup>202</sup>

Yoga is a many-faceted phenomenon, and can be a symbol that holds a wide variety of interpretations. In the modern market of consumer capitalism yoga is a vague symbol, herein lays its broad appeal. Yoga takes on a kind of polyvocality – it is healthy, it is spiritual, it will make you fit and successful – as the practice is associated with a certain moral, discipline, a wide range of benefits and transcendence, if not from this world, at least from certain mundane matters, as I have shown. As such, it might be approaching, or at least be a part of, a potent and nearly global “root paradigm”, in Turner’s (1974) understanding. In Ortner’s (1979) phrasing, yoga might be (-come) a key symbol. It is somewhat a summarizing symbol, condensing a wide variety of valued notions in today’s society, as well as prescribing strategies (key scenarios) – practicing yoga – for attaining them. There are several different forms of yoga, here meaning *asana* practice – which is what most people think of when talking about yoga – and they do different things. Additionally, “yoga” is much more embracive in its original meaning. Adding these perspectives up, I think most people can find some kind of “yoga” they can associate themselves with in some way.

It might seem paradoxical that striving for authenticity and individualism, and, to a certain degree, an anti-materialist ideal, is expressed through consumption. First of all, it has to be stressed that identity is expressed as much through what you do not consume, e.g., vegetarianism and veganism (which is consumption proper), as through what you consume. In theories of consumption – as well as in “consumer society” – non-consumption speaks loudly. Secondly, it is interesting to ask; how does one convey any experience of inner being, if not through external means?

---

think the next generation coming from the West, I mean there are a lot of wisdom coming back. So I have a lot of hope.

<sup>202</sup> Yoga has not always been known among the wider public. In Mysore, I was retold a story about David Swenson and his older brother (who introduced David, now one of the most famous Ashtangis, to yoga). Sometime in the early 1970s, they were practicing yoga together in a park when a police car came by, on a tip from an observer that they were worshipping the devil. In the early 1900s, yoga was associated with evil cults and sex worship (Love 2010).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

By what we eat, wear, read, watch, etc. we become and show who and what we are. We can also communicate to others who we want to be. This has become especially important in so called modern society where choices are not only possible, but options also numerous.<sup>203</sup>

### The life style industries and the commodification of yoga

... the body market has inflated to a degree unknown in human history. A large part of this has to do with the ways in which capitalism has turned the body into a commodity and a medium of conspicuous consumption. (Burton 2001 105)

Style (Hebdige 1999) has always been a mode of communication and clothing is a way of telling other people who you are or want to be. It is a part of how we stage our performances in our everyday lives (Goffman 1990). This is of course also the case for the body and how it is kept in general. We are judged by how fit we are, what we eat and how we look (Brewis and Sinclair 2000; Rugseth and Engelsrud 2011). The ideal today seems to be the youthful and fit body (Glassner 1989; Sassatelli 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006 and 2010; Stern 2008). Being fit and having a healthy looking body has become fashionable and trendy, and having a trimmed body tells people you have the time and money to keep it that way. Burton (2001) asks rhetorically:

What promotes this vain quest? One answer lies partly in the way that body is marketed in capitalistic society: “With these products I will have the ideal physical form and will therefore realize astounding success in all I venture.” All “happy” people in North America are physically fit. Those who participate in this commerce sense that they are in control of their bodies, when in fact, their behavior is controlled by the mythologies of commercialism... (Burton 2001 105)

Beauty has been linked to success, and yoga is promoted as a potential route to a beautiful fit body. Yoga is a way to get a healthy and well-functioning body, and the practice thereof will fix your back, centre you, calm your breathing, stress you down,

---

<sup>203</sup> It is not only important in modern societies, which can be inferred from Indian cases of “caste climbing”, in which formally God-given and eternal caste rankings have been change through so called Sanskritisation, and the adoption of high caste habits and characteristics. (e.g., Srinivas 1967)

and in general balance your body and make it well rounded, as was shown in Chapter 7. And these are just a few of the *physical* benefits. Additionally various forms of “power” yoga has become known as a way to keep the body fit, not only as a means to be healthy, but also to make it slim and look good. Ashtanga and other forms of dynamic, flow oriented yoga are especially well suited for this. Though such a narrow focus on the body is, as we have seen, warned against by many “serious” practitioners, the physical profit of the practice is nevertheless important to many. Fitness is not bad as such, but an obsession with body will side-track the real reason for the practice. Paula cautions:

Also one thing, which is definitely needed and which is definitely part of India is the devotion, the *bakthi*. Why you practicing yoga. And that’s is a very dangerous thing in the West, because a lot of people are sculpting the body, sculpting the mind, I mean totally sculpting the ego, with yoga practices, which is definitely not a *vidya* [clear understanding]. So there is a danger of course there.

Exercise and slimming is an important reason for many to practice yoga, but such consumption of yoga is according to Paula dangerous both for the practitioner and the tradition itself, and it is not a clear understanding of what yoga is. Although some get stuck on the physical plane, for others it can be an entrance. Martin has seen the same:

So the place that I work [in Bangkok], it’s a big studio. The big... The money is in the hot classes - the *Bikhrum* style, hot classes. 70 people come. Every day, every day, every day, two-three classes a day. And they come, and it’s mostly young women, and they come because they’ve heard that this yoga is gonna keep them, or make them, slim. That’s why they come. And then what happens is, some of them see something in it and think; well, hold on a minute, this is quite good, but maybe I should sniff around and try some of these other classes. What else they got? Ok, they’ve got *Vinyasa*, don’t know what that is, let’s try that. So they come to a *Vinyasa* class, and then some of them will go... will have this sort of similar experience that I had, perhaps you had, and go; well, this is better than this hot thing, I’m gonna try a few of these, and then maybe some of those. Will think, well what’s... then what is *Ashtanga* self-practice? What’s that?

In Bangkok, Bikhrum style, hot classes are undertaken to stay or become slimmer, but some trickle through, get interested and explore the world of yoga further. So sculpting the body as a form of conspicuous consumption is an important factor for

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

some who start practicing yoga, although for those who see themselves as more serious practitioners this is fraught with problems. Most will claim that all yoga practice is good, but staying in the practice to shape the body is definitely not the best reason, and it will not get you far on the true path.

Yoga might, in a society of consumer culture, be interpreted as a subcultural movement, and/or as a part of the “alternative” scene. “Alternative” spiritual/religious groups have an attitude that is

... avowedly and selfconsciously (...) in dynamic tension with – if not outright opposition to – the hitherto dominant ideas and structures of ‘official’ religion and secular science alike. Put simply, these currents invariably understand themselves to be ‘alternative’, either strongly (they are explicitly dissenting) or weakly (they are merely variant or optional). (Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000: 2)

According to Hebdige (1999), spectacular subcultures are concerned with consumption, and operate within the leisure sphere. Yoga as spiritual seeking is more comprehensive in many practitioners lives (although as a form of exercise it not necessarily is), but still an adherence to yoga might be communicated through various commodities such as a certain way of dressing and a special diet. The holistic outlook of a lot of yoga philosophy also has an impact in an age where environmentalism and sustainability has become not only vital, but also fashionable. These things, or this style, as well as the practice in itself tell something about the individual to the surroundings. It purports a special message of an alternative way of being in the world, as I have also shown can be the case with tattoos. These “messages” and the imagery of yoga can further be incorporated by commercial actors, as Hebdige notes: “Each new subculture establishes new trends, generate new looks and sounds which feeds back into the appropriate industries” (Hebdige 1999: 95).

This feedback might either happen through trying to sell goods to yoga practitioners or through using yoga to sell other more disconnected commodities. The subcultural symbols are appropriated by outsiders, commodified and thus, codified and made more rigid (Hebdige 1999: 95-96). The practitioners cautioning against mere sculpting of the body and their insistence on its power in moving people beyond

bodily concerns might be an attempt at safe-guarding yoga from being fully subsumed by the fitness industries.

### Yoga©<sup>204</sup> and the market: The retail price

PURO YOGA wishes to reach people who are searching for the true experience of yoga. We are traditional and true to the Indian philosophy, without having to give up on the Western lifestyle. Anyway, it brings consciousness to most. We encourage all to an open, dedicated and at the same time playful yoga practice. We are concerned about how yoga enrich lives, and gives greater peace of mind and quality of life, but also how yoga practice betters health, beauty, strength and bodily control. (...) We want to give our visitors quality, tradition and belonging! (Brochure Puro Yoga, my translation from Norwegian.)<sup>205</sup>

This brochure is quite telling of how yoga is marketed and sold, and how many people view it today. The Western fascination of yoga circles around ideas of truth and authenticity – the true experience of yoga. The Indian tradition is the authentic path, and the Indian philosophy holds truths that have been lost in the West. This is the real deal. But at the same time, India represents lifestyles that are not compatible with some of our world-views and ideas of how to live.

What is sold is a combination of the traditional Indian secret insights and the modern Western life. You are told that you can reap the benefits of the authentic Indian knowledge and practice at the same time as you retain a Western lifestyle. You do not have to forego/forsake the modern pleasures. Although traditionally a practice that renounced the world, today yoga can be combined with worldly living and comforts. Practicing still furthers consciousness.

According to Flood (2007), the term yoga refers to technologies or disciplines geared towards

---

<sup>204</sup> See note 195, page 322 for a reference on the debate that has been waged about taking copyright on *asanas* and sequences of *asanas*.

<sup>205</sup> «PURO YOGA ønsker å nå mennesker som søker en sann opplevelse av yoga. Vi er tradisjonelle og tro til den indiske filosofien, uten å måtte gi avkall på den vestlige livsstilen. Det fremmer uansett bevisstgjøring hos de fleste. Vi oppfordrer alle til en åpen, dedikert og samtidig leken yogapraksis. Vi er opptatt av hvordan yoga beriker liv og gir større sinnsro og livskvalitet, men også hvordan yogapraksis fremmer bedre helse, skjønnhet, styrke og kroppsbeherskelse. (...) Vi ønsker å gi våre besøkende kvalitet, tradisjon og tilhørighet!» (Brochure PURO YOGA, Oslo)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

... spiritual experience and profound understanding or insight into the nature of existence. Yoga is the means whereby the mind and senses can be restrained, the limited, empirical self or ego (*ahankāra*) can be transcended and the self’s true identity eventually experienced. (Flood 1997: 94)

When such understandings reach a wider audience – as they, to some degree, do, albeit the “deepest” sense might not be grasped – it is no wonder that it has a certain appeal. The practice is very personal, as is the spiritual quest. Through seeking, or shopping/consumption, personal experience is sought and personal belief tailored. It is also very fitting in a society where “being true to yourself” has become a slogan of sorts. Consumerism evolves much around this notion, as do much of the holistically oriented spiritual paths:

... the fashion in holism and “humanistic” medicine disciplines patients to be true to “their own nature” (...). Similarly Baudrillard has suggested that contemporary consumerism itself fosters the notion of being true to oneself. (Langford 1995: 359)<sup>206</sup>

When concepts such as yoga travel the globe, and are appropriated into other cultural settings, they are bound to change (Bal 2002). Money, according to Liberman (2008), is often a part of this transformative process, like many yoga practitioners fear:

Of course, no one would argue that forms of culture should not be adapted to the local needs and contingencies of a society that come to adopt them, but how much license can be taken? For instance, though since the earliest times nongrasping, and renunciation are mandated practices in yoga, in Western countries value is generally signified not by the absence of wealth but by how much something costs. Krishnamacharya, a Dravidian Brahmin who learned his *hatha* yoga in Tibet and is best known as the guru of B.K.S. Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois, had as first Western disciple the Russian yogini Indra Devi, and Indra Devi taught her disciples to charge large sums for lessons in yoga, for the reason she believed Americans were incapable of developing respect for anything that was free. Yet in India, some Indian swamis steadfastly refuse to accept payment for spiritual instruction. Was the practice of Indra Devi, one of the pioneers of yoga in the West, non-yogic? (Liberman 2008: 107)

---

<sup>206</sup> As such, consumerism, spirituality and health seem to be intimately linked to the notion of “being true to oneself” today.



A price tag with a high number can itself be interpreted as a sign of authenticity and seriousness, i.e., if it is costly, it is real (and probably better). This seems to be the way we are thinking.<sup>207</sup> Indra Devi, as such, exploited the American, or perhaps Pan-Western, mentality to employ yoga as a practice. If Devi knew that this was the only way to make Americans adopt yoga, a practice that indorses nongrasping and, in general, an ascetic attitude, her method of “making interesting” would be the correct thing to do. Would not the goal of spreading yogic ideals, to some degree, pardon the methods used for spreading the practice? Liberman (2008) himself goes on to state that:

Highly commodified popular adaptations provide a sizeable financial base for the growth of yoga in modern times. However, even more important than this, if yoga were not commodified, it is quite possible that it could not even be communicated in the modern world, for nothing that is incapable of being marketed can survive for long. (Liberman 2008: 111)

In other words, the commodification of yoga is a necessary evil in his eyes. Yoga has to be conveyed in a way that is meaningful to those who are targeted, much in line with what Indra Devi told her students. But Liberman (2008) still does not seem to be able to resolve the problem of money in yoga, and commodification is, in general, something to overcome. As he writes:

In India and the West, spiritual yearning is vulnerable to commodity fetishism. Though lineages can be commodified as can books, within the face-to-face relationship of a teacher and student it is possible that commodification can be overcome. (Liberman 2008: 110)

Money, as such, becomes a moral issue in a practice that Liberman (2008) sees as traditionally void of such exchanges. And as I have shown, the financial and commercial aspects of the yoga “industry” are debated within yoga circles.

Yoga is, as I have on many occasions shown, a complex phenomenon, and there is a wide range of ideas concerning what it is and what it does. There are great physical benefits, and, additionally, one will get in touch with one’s true self, as well as acquire a smashing ass. Yoga is an oasis of calm in our exhaust ridden, dust filled,

---

<sup>207</sup> Which is somewhat paradoxical as money also is thought to be corruptive, making relationships and goods “less real”.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

car-horn honking, heavily work-laden and ego-driven lives. Yoga is the key, not only to the perfect body, but also to a better life. These are the images of yoga that make people want to try it. Add to this, a few extremely fit pop-cultural icons, the mysticism and arcane secrets of India, the promise of a healthy and youthful body and a tad of the exclusive, and the yoga package becomes very sellable indeed. You can make it what you want. This kind of bricolage (Lévi-Strauss 1966) is typical of modern cultures, in general, according to Sutcliffe (2000), who writes:

Seeking, sampling, exploring – or, more bluntly, ‘shopping’, ‘touring’, ‘scavenging’: whatever the precise term used, these kinds of spiritual *bricolage* have become increasingly commonplace, even mainstream, strategies in post-1960s America and modern cultures in general. (Sutcliffe 2000 17)

Langford (1995), in the quote above, says awareness towards one’s own needs and one’s body is one of the goals fostered by modern consumerism. When questioned about what impact yoga might have on Western society and “the Western mind”, Martin also holds that it is the individual who must practice and experience yoga, but that all, to a certain extent, will have the same experience:

So I mean, I think, I just presume it’s doing something like what it did to me, to some people. I mean, it has to be experienced by the individual, I don’t think we can talk about like an effect on any kind of mass. It’s just, if an individual practice yoga, then they might feel something for it, they might experience changes, they might experience different desires as I did. You know, if I talk to my father, I mean, he sees that there is a trend. He doesn’t want to practice it, he’s now eighty years old or whatever, but he sees... He can see that it is a trend, he’s hearing about yoga here, there and everywhere. He’s reading about it in the newspaper. But the individual has to practice, don’t they, to feel something. And to one extent or another they gonna have to have similar experience to me, to a certain extent.

All in all, most yoga students are highly conscious consumers, and as...

... seekers tend to believe that their inner states of attraction and repulsion, hope and fear, desire and contempt, were the only reliable revelations of the really real, rooted in the authentic emotional core of their selves. However, these desires and aversions remained wholly abstract unless and until they were realized in the concrete universe of things. So, although commodification and the influence of the media rendered external universe suspect and turned the gaze inward, the material world still beckoned – as it always has – as the

location in which an objectified self-identity could be expressed and collectively validated.  
(Lindholm 2008 57)

Practicing yoga can be seen as conveying an idealized/coveted image of self, but the consumption of yoga does not only express this real, emotional core; according the practitioners, it also creates it. Doing yoga is an expression of otherness (as well as the intention/craving to be different) and *becoming* the other. It is enfolding yoga and related goods into one's life. Doing yoga also communicates to others that you have found your inner self – or at least are committed to finding it. By practicing this way of living, this way of living becomes real. It is not just conspicuous consumption, and a way of trying to impress the surrounding, but also a way of becoming and embodying the ideals one sets for oneself. In enacting (Mol 2005) the self it comes into being, it is changed.

### 9.3 Yoga, “money and the morality of exchange”<sup>208</sup>

Money has an impact on the practice not only through yoga being marketed as “a lifestyle choice”. Yoga has become a commodity and is commercialized in many ways, but it is somewhat morally ambiguous to exchange lessons for money and the cost of practicing is questioned. Also quite a few yoga students will react to how yoga is used to sell other products, and the many products – and the cost of these – that surround the practice. In this part, I will explore the view and influence of money in yoga as it has travelled from India to the West and not least back.

That there is a lot of money to be made in yoga can, according to some, be seen in the rapid growth of yoga schools in Gokulam after KPJAYI (then AYRI) moved there from Lakshmipuram in 2001. When moving there it reputedly was the sole yoga school in that part of Mysore, now there are at least four or five different schools catering to all the Western students and travellers. The economic potential of yoga is also seen in the growth of the existing shalas elsewhere in Mysore. For instance Ajay has recently built a new and bigger shala for Shtalam8, in Lakshmipuram. Mystic school has also grown rapidly. With about 200-250 students in the peak season from January through February, each paying INR 27350 (Indian Rupees, INR 550 ≈ \$10,

---

<sup>208</sup> (Bloch & Parry 1989)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

August 2012) for the first month of practice and INR 17425 each following month<sup>209</sup>, it is clear that KPJAYI also has a very large turnover. Although some of this goes to the charity foundation, Shri K. Pattabhi Jois Charitable Trust,<sup>210</sup> there is additional income from the store and various courses in Sanskrit and Chanting. The prices charged at the Shala are defended by many who say that KPJAYI gives much back to the local community, either directly or by drawing huge crowds of foreigners who spend a lot of money in Gokulam. Still, the kind of money they make is also much talked about, as some were joking at breakfast one morning:

The energy and the sweat from your neighbour are free. For everything else, there is a stack of rupees. There is money just floating around in that room [the office at the Shala], everywhere there are stacks of money.

When some student wanted to stay a bit longer, we found out that the Shala charges INR 14000 for two weeks of practice. If you want to stay just a few days longer that will cost INR 1200 a day, and though most paid this without even blinking and thought it was an ok deal, people joked about it, saying that would be INR 400 per drop-back, and Saraswathi would probably charge more for dips.<sup>211</sup> Most would claim there are too much money involved in yoga though, and some told of how Guruji in his 30s would take his bicycle to get to one of his students and only charge INR 5 per month for teaching him. Today the fame and popularity – and as such most students would also take some of the blame – makes it possible for the Shala to charge any sum of money. People will still wait outside the gates at 0430 AM. At one point, Guruji, as a joke, supposedly said to a student in class, “Money – *asanas*”, which means, “if you give me money, I will give you *asanas*”, which shows that there is an awareness, not only among the students, of the exchanges being made.<sup>212</sup>

There is definitely a significant amount of money involved, especially in Mysore. Even there yoga has become a product that is sold and consumed; it is not only happening in the West. Rumours say that some of the other shalas were established just to make money, and not all the students who make the journey to India makes it

---

<sup>209</sup> These are the 2009 prices.

<sup>210</sup> <http://www.kpjtrust.org>

<sup>211</sup> 185610052009

<sup>212</sup> 065412082009

in the belief that they find the true yoga. As teachers it gives them credibility to say that they have practiced in Mysore, and if they practice Ashtanga, practicing with Sharath, and earlier with Guruji, provides another selling point. Despite the misgivings I have described, over little one-on-one teaching, being left to your own device, and that it is too crowded, still people come. In a market where the demand is that high, and with much monopoly on the supply side, the limits on prices are few. “Pure capitalism,” complaining voices might claim. They ask: How yogi-like is it to charge that much from people coming to Mysore to practice yoga? Pattabhi Jois did not exactly live the life of a yogi as they stereotypically are depicted. He was married, had children, a large house, and quite a bit of money. It was not exactly the life of detachment and renunciation, it is remarked.

Alter (2008) notes how money has been a part in transforming the relationship between those who teach yoga and those who learn, as he writes about “... the transition of the *guru* into a remunerated, professional yoga instructor and the *śisya* into a client\*” (Alter 2008: 88, the asterisk is note 36, which is quoted below).

In the note to this statement, he elaborates on this claim and writes:

This observation is in no way intended to imply a general judgment about the modern remunerated teacher’s integrity, nor to suggest that financial gain should be considered the prime motivating factor in modern yoga teaching. Despite yoga relatively recent association with corporate business, cynicism is not a prevalent feature in most modern yoga milieux. (Alter 2008: 95, n. 36)

This is interesting since many students in Mysore – though at times much preoccupied with the money issue and hinting to both Guruji and Sharath’s fondness of money, and the high charges in the Shala – do not judge the Shala for charging too much and have never, as far as I can remember, gone as far as to suggest that money in any way is *the* motivation for teaching. The transition, Alter (2008) points to, of guru into professional instructor, which I will get back to further down, shows the effect of subsumption on the relation between guru and yoga practitioner. As a composite relation between someone who is initiated and someone who will be, something approaching a patron-client relationship, and between a seller and a buyer of goods,

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

these relations are becoming imbalanced and intermixed, and seller-buyer relationship crosses a sphere previously protecting the “sanctity” of the guru-disciple relation. More on the perceived impact of money below.

I do not know how many times I heard people trying to figure out how much the Shala might make in a month, but the numbers were always very high, and most were to some degree critical of this mixing of money and yoga. Shalas in the States might charge more than \$20 a class, or \$350 a month, and in Norway, some studios charge NOK 1800 (Norwegian kroner, NOK 100 ≈ \$17) a month, and up to NOK 200 for a drop-in class. In Tokyo, classes at the main shala are €30 (≈ \$37), and a friend of mine had ended up practicing in a small room with a sofa and a TV in the home of some kind lady instead. Roger also has some misgivings about where the money issue can take yoga. When he started practicing yoga, he mostly practiced on his own because of the inavailability of high-level teachers, which he attributed partly to how yoga teachers are trained in the USA<sup>213</sup>:

There was a studio that was about an hour from where I lived so I couldn't really go there that much. So then I started practicing on my own, and I haven't really had a teacher. So when I decided to come here I was mainly to practice with a teacher for an extended period of time. The place I live now is a lot closer to the studio that does Ashtanga, but at this point the level of teachers there is just... for me it's not worth going. I don't know how it is where you live, but in the US there is a lot of what they call yoga teacher training programs, and pretty much anybody can do a yoga teacher training program. That's a big money maker for people that do it. You know, they charge about 3000 dollars, usually, and, you pay your money and it's usually a 200 hours course then you [can] call yourself a yoga teacher, and a lot of these people that are teaching yoga, you know, that's all they've done. Maybe they have practiced sort of a few years here and there, but they are not.... They don't really have very deep level of knowledge, and maybe people who have been doing yoga for 6-7 years, and they're like... They call themselves yoga teachers. So I was really looking for a real teacher. When you look at the different options, it's actually not that expensive over all to come here, even though you pay a lot for the studio, it's very cheap to live here compared to practicing with any teacher in the US.

---

<sup>213</sup> As was shown in the debate in the aftermath of the New York Times article on injuries in yoga (Broad 2012a) the money issue is not the only reason why people are concerned about the state of teacher training in the USA today – although financial interests are mentioned here as well.

Money then becomes the main issue. If you can pay your way, you can also make others pay you afterwards. All it takes is money to earn the qualification of yoga teacher. According to George this is a change that has happened in later years. Money has become a necessary evil in yoga because it is human nature seek power and riches. Commenting on the influence of money in yoga, George said it is hard to balance spirituality and money, and continued:

In the past, I think it worked, because people that wanted to renounce their lives, they would beg, and people would give money because they were the spiritual seekers. But everyone begs now, and no one wants to give money to beggars. So there's that... That doesn't work anymore, in these times. Something's changed.

Me: What stuff changed? Cause there's not only in the yoga, but in the world of the popular gurus, there seems to be a lot of money involved and a lot of commercialism. Do you think it's bad influence on the yoga...?

George: Well that's just people - human nature. And that's just coming to surface... Yeah, money will control you. It's power. Yeah, I can't say anything more about that, it's just human nature.

George points to a general societal development, and although he does not really expound upon what this change entails, he points to human nature. Money has a larger influence in today's society, and money will control you. There are fewer "true" spiritual seekers and renunciators, and there are fewer people who will give money to and help those who are. It is human nature, and it is just now coming to the surface. Balancing the control that money can assert on people with spirituality is problematic in a yoga context, though, because as Liberman says, "... since the earliest times nongrasping, and renunciation are mandated practices in yoga... (Liberman 2008: 107)

The discussion on yogis and *bhogis* that I dealt with in Chapter 6 illustrates that these values still are central in yoga circles, and that asceticism and nongrasping have been central elements in the teachings of yoga since the inception of the practice seems to be something that most scholars in the field agree on. Nevertheless, or perhaps, because of these teachings, money and commodification have become controversial topics in and around the yoga milieu. It is just hard for people to sort out the money

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

issue when there are, clearly, huge economic interests involved. Under “Western influence”, it is claimed, money has become a central element in yoga practice, whether it is Shala and studio fees, workshops, mats or wardrobe. Yoga has become a, or rather, several, million dollar industries. Practitioners themselves battle with the incongruences that they perceive between the teachings of the yoga philosophy and what they meet in their real life daily practices, as do scholars who question the authenticity and sincerity of Modern Yoga teachers and lineages partly on these grounds (e.g., Liberman 2008).

As for practicing at the Shala, students question the amount of money they need have to pay to practice for a month or few, and some comment upon the incommensurability of charging for yoga in the first place, since it seems counter to what yoga is supposedly all about. Some long for the long lost days when Guruji charged only INR 5 a month, and developed long lasting relationships with his students. Others blame the popularity, and have a rather pragmatic view of the whole thing: since we can afford it, why not pay. Liberman (2008) observes:

Though it may be observed that the most genuine varieties of yoga in the West have arrived accompanied by a guru lineage, it should be stated that it is not very difficult for a yoga teacher to construct, as part of the packaging, a lineage that can be marketed with the yoga.\* Initiations are even sold, and the process of accreditation with legitimate lineage can be expensive; moreover, accreditation contains a paralegal element that may not always fit well with the spiritual wellsprings of yoga. (Liberman 2008: 110. \* marks an omitted note)

Lineage makes Mysore and yoga there very marketable. This is because Mysore might be the most important source for yoga in general and for Ashtanga especially, through Krishnamacharya and Guruji respectively. Mysore is denoted the “Yoga Capital” and “Ashtanga City” (Vargas 2005).

Steve, of the Confluence Countdown (TCC 4), based on the tales of his teachers, and a few of my informants, based on their recurrent visits in Mysore, think something might have been in the process of change for a while and they bemoan the growing crowds in the Shala. The style of teaching has changed as each student receives less attention and the practice is more standardised. Liberman (2008) traces these changes to the influx of money and more uniplex relationships of capitalistic modern societies:



The most important part of guru devotion, however, is having a teacher who knows one well enough to know how to keep pushing one beyond the customary boundaries of one's imagination. This requires that both the student and the teacher assume responsibility for each other, a connection that is not provided for in capitalism nor in the ideals of professionalism that capitalism fosters. (Lieberman 2008: 112)

These observations resemble the classical anthropological contributions of Bohannan (1959) and Barth (1967/1996b) on economic spheres and the impact of money in the first case and entrepreneurial innovation in the latter. What both observed was reduction of barriers between economic spheres and disruption of “traditional” structures in the Tiv and Fur societies respectively. In their article “Money and the Morality of Exchange” Bloch and Parry (1989) explores how things and objects changes moral hues and characterizations, and what can be exchanged in fiscal transactions and not – for instance “love”. In his “The Cultural Biography of Things”, Kopytoff (1986) writes about commodification, and how things throughout their lifetime change from commodities to entities that cannot be exchanged for money, and/or back again. Single entities are not necessarily stuck in one category.

In the case of yoga, it is claimed that money and financial interests professionalises and thus erode the *guru-śisya* (disciple) relationship, making it instead more of an instructor-client relation (Lieberman 2008). Ideally this relationship is based on love, respect, and surrendering, while now it is increasingly mixed with aspects of economic exchange, which is less long-term, less committing (on both parts), and less respectful. As the clients pay they way, they are less inclined to be subordinate and might be more inclined to demand their money's worth. In Bloch and Parry's (1989) vocabulary money might be said to have transformed the guru-disciple relation to a relation more based on a short-term exchange rather than a long-term exchange “... concerned with the reproduction of the social and cosmic order” (Bloch & Parry 1989). ‘Exchange’ is a somewhat tendentious and confusing term, since, in Marx’ terminology, the concept is tied to the concept of commodities, and thus might better be substituted with a broader category, as ‘interchange’<sup>214</sup>, but the short- and long-term interchange are relevant. Bloch and Parry’s observations bear resemblance to

---

<sup>214</sup> In German ‘Auswechslung,’ or in Norwegian ‘utveksling.’

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Mauss’ (1954) famous treaties on the nature of the gift. The giving, or interchange, of gifts ensures the continuity of relationships in establishing and sustaining social obligations in the form of social indebtedness towards those who have brought the gift. Money, in the cash deal case, do not ensure any such continuity, as the exchange is immediate and thus void of future obligation. However, the increasing significance of money loans, coined *Zahlungsmittel* (means of payment) by Marx (his second sub-function of the third money function *Geld*; cf. Marx 2001 *Volume I*, Ch. 3.3.b: 194ff) during the evolution of the system of capital, indicates that it is not correct to contrast gifts vs. money as delayed inter-change vs. non-delayed; the crucial difference is that the *personal intimacy* connected to the delay is much more striking in the case of the gift. Viewed the other way around, the inter-change of gifts may *not* be delayed, as in the custom of Christmas gift giving, and also, in such simultaneous cases, it is the degree of personal intimacy that constitutes the criterion of distinction between gift and money.

Both the gift of love from the guru, and the gift of respect and surrendering from the disciple retain an element of the giver, while payment by money does not encourage such personal and more intimate ties. Although money’s disruptive effect on social relationships and societies has been a question of debate (Bloch & Parry 1989), this view has a certain resonance among yoga practitioners. Teaching yoga, in the eyes of most practitioners in Mysore, should bear stronger resemblances to giving a gift than to a fiscal exchange. The popularity of yoga attracts teachers and instructors who are more interested in earning money and acquiring credibility in the community in the form of, for instance, authorisation, and who are less idealistically inclined and interested in spreading the “gospel” of yoga and just practicing. Though money is involved in the interchanges between yoga students and the teachers, they are still not purely “exchanges” and students do form long lasting relationships with both Sharath and Saraswathi. On the other hand, students do perceive the “sacredness” and spirituality of yoga – what yoga is really about – as threatened by commercialisation, also on a global scale. Money is morally problematic in a practice where non-grasping and spirituality are among the most central notions of the teachings, and as we have seen economic questions and suspicions of less than righteous financial interests create tension and a certain uncomfortable atmosphere among yoga practitioners, as displayed in the Tudor-Jones case. It seems to be a prevalent attitude among the

practitioners that yoga should not be about money. Yet money and financial interests are necessarily part of the parcel, as many of the students in Mysore also are teachers who make a living from yoga. Though probably somewhat exaggerated, Liberman (2008) claims to observe that "...nothing that is incapable of being marketed can survive for long" (Liberman 2008: 111). Money as such *are* important – both to be able to practice and for living from teaching – but morally ambiguous in the yoga community. Bloch and Parry (1989) argues:

The problem seems to be that *for us* money signifies a sphere of 'economic' relationship which are inherently impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating. There is therefore something profoundly awkward about offering it as a gift expressive of relationships which are supposed to be personal, enduring, moral and altruistic. (Bloch & Parry 1989: 9)

Core values in the yoga philosophy seem to fit better with the last set of adjectives (personal, enduring, moral and altruistic) than the first, and since *to us* "economy" is a domain where moral precepts do not apply to the same degree as in other spheres of society (ibid.), the mixing of money and the morality of yoga becomes paradoxical. *We* tend to view gifts as separate from market exchange, while other ideologies might not do this (ibid.). *We*, as Westerners, have the idea that money corrupts and disintegrate "traditional" societies, and thus we might not be able to discern the real complexity of why changes occur (ibid.). The reasoning of Bloch and Parry (1989) may be somewhat reductionist and simplifying in their demarcation between us and them, but, in general, as argued by Kopytoff (1986), there seems to be a potential for an object or 'use-value' that is *precedingly* functioning in the form of money to *transform* into a *proceeding* functioning in the form of a gift, as well as, the other way around. Extrapolating this a bit, it seems reasonable that such transformation, i.e., whether a certain object or 'use-value' functions in the form of a gift or in the form of money, depends on the more specific cultural configuration of economic relations involved in the whole context at hand. And such configurations may be quite complex and include ambiguities, paradoxes and symbolic transformations of money vs. gift aspects of economic form connected to *positivistically* non-changed objects or 'use-values'. Man is quite essentially a *symbolic* and quite creative creature, and this is important to have in mind also when regarding the *relation* between positivistic

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

entities and *semiosis of signification* of such entities in the symbolic constitution and transformation of economic forms such as gift vs. money.

While many yoga students – and some scholars – might think that money is changing yoga, there are also other elements in these processes. Even so, it is an important aspect of the personal story of many students. When Markus, an Austrian guy, for instance, says he comes to India to escape the shallow capitalistic consumer society of the West, and Chris gives away most of his clothes to live a simpler life, the centrality of money and economic issues in certain sectors of the yoga community become areas of tension that have to be resolved in the personal stories of these practitioners, either by turning a blind eye to the whole thing, simply joking about it, debating it or defining “economic interest” as necessary to spread the fundamentally good message – like Indra Devi (Lieberman 2008: 107). All in all, yoga’s relationship to money is not resolved, and that is the reason for the controversy that financial interest can spark in the community.

What is the case, though, is that “yoga” – and as we have seen argued by some yoga practitioners even the title “yoga teacher” – in many instances, has become a “commodity” (Kopytoff 1986) that can be obtained by money. The controversial part of this is whether this is “real” yoga or not. Paying for 200 hours of teacher training to become a “certified” yoga teacher is deplorable to many aspiring yogis. Money is not sufficient to obtain the necessary experience to teach yoga. “Yoga” is as such a more singular (Kopytoff 1986) entity, and in the exchange of yoga the economic aspect is mostly down-played and under-communicated (Goffman 1990). The ambiguous effect of money in yoga practice is shown in the debates on money and the morality of charging for yoga lessons etc. that surfaces ever so often. Yoga constitutes a sphere of interchanges that should be only partly overlapping with the sphere of market exchange. Though money is tremendously important in modern yoga – in buying mats, cloths, shala memberships, flying to India, and countless other things – money is emically considered not to constitute the driving force behind neither teaching nor practicing. Yoga and yoga related goods are at certain points commoditised, but yoga as such should not be defined by these kinds of exchanges. The yoga practice is “singularised” (Kopytoff 1986), it is unique and highly personal, and thus not suitable for exchange. It is important to note that what is described here is not inherent

qualities in the nature of neither money, the market, nor yoga, but rather how these categories and entities – their interaction and the impact they might have – are viewed by yoga practitioners I have encountered. For yoga practitioners in Mysore, it might be said that their practice is partly sacralised, and thus set apart from the sphere of money. (Durkheim 1979; Kopytoff 1986)

Money is considered dirty insofar as money is associated with Western capitalism, conspicuous consumption and excess, all of which resonate badly with what is taught as important aspects of the yoga practice, where moderation, asceticism and renunciation are central images. And if they are not actual standards of living among modern practitioners, they resonate quite well with certain anti-consumerism, anti-materialism and anti-capitalism notions that have gained popularity in later years. At the same time, though, it seems that money in some respects and to some extent can become symbolically converted into something that sustains the practice, extends the stay in India or enables teaching more people in a better way, and as such it becomes a contributing part of a *long-term personal* relation. Insofar as non-grasping and contentment are central notions to many serious practitioners, “money mongering” may be considered not as solely “... concerned with the arena of individual competition” (Bloch and Parry 1989: 24).

This is parallel to parts of the argument presented by Tumbat and Belk (2011) in the article “Marketplace Tensions in Extraordinary Experiences”. An argument among the mountaineers on Mount Everest is whether experience or money/expenditure is what make someone the most deserving of reaching the summit. There is some tension on Everest between the experienced mountaineers and the rich who are there for the prestige and novelty. It can be argued that both, however, are vital for a successful expedition. At the same time, the increase in people trying to reach the highest point in the world decreases the exclusiveness of the experience and heightens the competition between the climbers, which also has a negative impact on the solidarity and community feeling among the them. (Tumbat and Belk 2011) Similar tendencies can also be observed among the yoga students in Mysore, where it is necessary to “prove oneself” to some degree.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Rumours and suspicions of (unjust) economic interests, or of making yoga “a business”, has an impact on individuals’ practices, as it makes people distance themselves from certain teachers or yoga studios, and take their practices elsewhere. Money, and values associated with money, like greed and hoarding, are deemed unyogic, and create boundaries within the yoga community, though these boundaries between practitioners are neither static nor eternal. Yoga students, like everybody else, can change their opinion when their experience tell them that they have been wrong – they might have met a teacher they earlier have just heard about, they might have heard a different story about a fellow students, or “just” have realised that it is unyogic to judge someone based on rumours.

Yoga is even by some practitioners associated with a certain wealth, and yoga seems to appeal to people of economic means, and the association with an alternative more “conscious” living appeals to people who are educated (and therefore also of a certain economic group). My friend, Chris, a web designer from Mexico, found that he did not really need all the clothes he owned and decided to give most of it away before going to India. In India, he would rather go to the tailor and have a few quality garments made, and he went on to give away much of what he had brought with him as well. He neither wanted nor needed to lug all his belongings around. He wanted a simpler kind of living. As observed by Jennifer:

To some extent it can seem like, white educated people who grow up with enough money are doing this. Of course not completely, and of course like most people who are teaching yoga have been willing to let go of making much money in life, but I think it’s usually the people who were raised with enough money that don’t then prioritize making it in their life, and usually people who grow up in poverty that feel like they need to make money, cause it’s a survival thing.

Meg: So the yoga’s also kind of a luxury item for people who can afford it?

Jennifer: Yeah, and I think that’s a real shame, because it’s supp... I mean, I think it sucks that a class in New York city is 23 dollars, because if something is to benefit people don’t you wanna make it accessible to all who are in need, not just those who can pay 350 dollars a month and not be working and let go of all outside life responsibilities? And if we look at anything, like how many people here bring their own laptops, or have I-phones or whatever. Or are wearing 90 dollar yoga pants, and of course not everyone, and some people are just

choosing to live with more consciousness about materialism, even though maybe their background would make them able to afford it, but I think that's an important aspect. I mean, it almost reminds me of like looking at the hippies, like who were the hippies? White kids in the US, doing a lot of drugs, not to offend anyone who was a hippie, but... I think it was largely a class of privilege. And both hippies and yoga practitioners wear hemp, so maybe there's some connection. Hahaha!

Jennifer questions the morality and the asceticism of today's yoga students. Being able to practice yoga – both money- and time-wise – is partly a class privilege. Those who are conscious about the materialist aspects of the practice have mostly *chosen* to take a step back from materialism and live a simpler life – it is usually not because they have to.

As such, there is a whiff of economic elitism from yoga – it is an activity for those who can afford it, for those who have the opportunity to step out of bounds to some degree, or alternatively for the “educated few” who can see and know the benefits of either this particular form of exercise or the simple life (depending on what yoga road it is decided that one should travel). In this, embracing (some forms of) yoga is rather similar to the hippie movement of the 60s and 70s. The “enlightened” well-educated middle class youth are the ones who first break away to fully embrace the alternative lifestyle. Lindholm (2008 59) points to the “bobos” – bohemian bourgeoisie – who are “... affluent yet opposed to materialism” (Lindholm 2008: 59, quoting Brooks 2000). This group's high standing is based on the intellectual and creative ability, and has resulted from their own achievements rather than hereditary status. They are “... well-educated, hard-working, and ambitious...” (Lindholm 2008: 59). Yoga practitioners bear a rather striking resemblance to this group.

Although many see the influx of money and Westerners into yoga practice as problematic and morally indistinct<sup>215</sup>, others actually claim that yoga has been

---

<sup>215</sup> It could, of course, be argued here that what is actually happening is not so much the introduction of money into yoga - a system of spiritual practice where it has not been a central means of exchange – but rather that yoga as a practice is introduced into a system where money is one of the most important inducements for action. Yoga is the new element in the “universe” of Western society. Nevertheless, though the yoga students are preoccupied with the positive effects of yoga practice on “Modern, Western society and people”, they are concerned about money's impact on yoga as an ideology and a practice. At this point it could be interesting to delve further into the anthropological debate on capitalism, monetisation, commoditisation, and the impact of money on “traditional” societies (Barth

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

revitalised – or even saved – by the growing Western interest in the practice (see also Mehta 1994: 192). As an Indian observer commented, according to Henrik: “In the West, people are further evolved and more developed. They have become interested in spiritual matters, while Indians are only interested in money. In the West, they have gone beyond that.”<sup>216</sup> Insofar as this reflects some truth, there is a paradoxical interchange involved, in the curious sense, that this could only become established and reproduced because the symbolic economic form tied to the interchanged money objects were significantly different – and complementary – between the selling vs. buying economic actors.

Despite that long-term personal interchange is deemed morally superior to short-term exchange, and money has an ambiguous status among modern day yoga practitioners, long-term interchanges are dependent on the short-term acquisitions of the individual. Bloch and Parry (1989) write:

Not only do the latter [short-term] provide much of the material wherewithal necessary for the reproduction of the encompassing order, but it also has to be acknowledged that this order can only perpetuate itself through the biological and economic activities of individuals. (Bloch and Parry 1989: 26)

This is true both in regards to the wider social and economic structures of the yoga community as it consists of studios, shalas, and teacher-disciple relations the world over – it was even true in the days of yore when ascetic yogis were dependent on alms – but also for yoga as a practice and philosophical/spiritual system as such. Without individual yoga practitioners who spend money and energy on their own personal practice, and who strive for physical and/or spiritual betterment, yoga as a practice would not have existed today – at least not in the way we know it. At the same time, the individual practitioner interprets and makes sense of his or her own experience of the practice in relation to the wider societal context of the yoga practice, as I have shown. This is something that many yoga practitioners are, to some degree, aware of, but the most horrifying scenario is “... that grasping individuals will divert the

---

1967/1996b; Bohannon 1959; Bloch and Parry 1989; Kopytoff 1986), but there is neither time nor place for that kind of excursion.

<sup>216</sup> On the other hand, it is also argued that we have lost our “original” spirituality, while in India “spirituality and religion is everywhere.” 17337022011



resources of the long-term cycle for their own short-term transactions” (Bloch and Parry 1989: 27). I think that it is this fear that sparks debate around such things as the Jois Yoga-controversy, 200 hour teacher trainings and changes in the practice that some choose to trace to economic interests or prestige.

The practice of yoga, i.e., the consumption thereof, creates connection to the true self, and, in order to get a validation of this newfound connection, it is central to consume the right kind of goods, i.e., products, that can tell fellow human beings that this connection has happened. And, as yoga, as a self-connecting and stress-relieving practice, becomes wider known, it gets more expensive as a commodity and more people want to earn money through yoga. As yoga starts selling and becomes a “brand”, it can also be used to sell other commodities. Thus, in the end, there is a danger that the “authenticity” that made it sell in the first place will be lost, and that yoga will become a Western pastime activity, rather than a spiritual endeavour for enlightenment and release, as it has been seen by many Western practitioners. As subcultures, like the hippie and the punk movement, have been recuperated, they have lost their edge, and have become a part of mainstream culture. Many fear that this is happening – or has already happened – to yoga.

#### **Paradoxes of ascetic rebellion**

Yoga, in its outspoken anti-materialistic outlook can be seen as a rebellion against the prevailing values of Western society. The yoga philosophy preaches detachment not only to ideas of self and accomplishments, but in general. Many yoga practitioners speak against commercialization and what they see as a general materialistic attitude of Western capitalistic culture. Turning to the non-materialistic ethos of yoga can as such be seen as a kind of rebellion against basic Western values where money and materialistic progress and affluence are seen as the major goals in life. Yoga represents a turn away from this, a turn towards moral and more spiritual goals. Crude materialism is chosen away, leaving room for personal betterment and some kind of higher moral. Yoga is not unique in this reaction and turn. The hippie movement of the 1960s and 70s, a movement that in many ways paved the way for yoga in the West, is, of course, an important predecessor. There is a certain notion of purity in both these movements. (e.g., Turner 1997) Turning away from the materialistic

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

masses is a turn towards a purer existence. The impurities of materialism and commercialism, where the soul is sold out, are rejected, leaving instead the soul or mind to be honed, and the *true* path to be walked. A parallel to this can perhaps be seen in the medieval monastic movements, where the religious virtuosi turned their backs on the ordinary world. The men and women who entered the ascetic orders chose to tread out of the stream of everyday life and dedicate their lives to spiritual matters. Every kind of material excess was rejected, the body disciplined and the mind (or soul) tuned towards “the greater good”. A more modern counterpart to the yogic movement can be seen in the straight-edge subculture (Schreiner 2011). As Schreiner (2011) writes, being sober and “clean” became the ultimate opposition, it was a rebellion against consumerism and need for pleasure that defined the mainstream in American culture. This rebellion was also a rebellion against parents of the hippie generation, and the nihilistic drug culture of the punk movement. In this environment it made more sense to rebel through *not* doing drugs. Being *clean* was a major notion in this movement. Another interesting link between straight-edge and yoga is that a few central people in the straight edge milieu, actually made the move into the Hare Krishna movement. As Schreiner (2011) points out, from the notion of “internal cleanliness” the leap into spirituality is not necessarily that far.<sup>217</sup> Other parallels between straight-edge, monasticism and yoga are ideas of sexual abstinence (which are inherent in monasticism and in yoga philosophy (if not in all practice), and was also a part of the straight-edge subculture), and vegetarianism. Mingled with these notions of asceticism and purity, there is also a notion of moral superiority, which can be felt in yoga, and could also be seen in straight edge. As seen in Anne Krogstad’s (1986) article on the punks in Skippergata, later to be known as Blitz, vegetarianism became a mechanism of internal control – it became a symbol of (moral) superiority where those “who ate corpses” had to endure much abuse. If not abuse, those who admit to eating meat in yoga circles must also endure comments and being looked at askew.

Like the female ascetics of the middle ages, yoga can also be seen as a way of taking control of one’s own body, if not one’s own sexuality. It has been intimated that part of the motivation for entering monastic orders during the middle ages was to de-

---

<sup>217</sup> One important difference, among many, is the violent side of straight-edge (Schreiner 2011).

sexualize one's own body and take control of one's own life. Fasting was a part of this (Bowie 2006). Similarly many yoga practitioners tell stories of fighting drug abuse, thus taking control and denying oneself certain substances, through yoga.

Perhaps somewhat paradoxically spiritual and ascetic "orientations" – both inwardly focused – are outwardly articulated, whether consciously or not, through clothing, demeanour, behaviour and speech. Though not always a conscious act, impression management (Goffman 1990) and conspicuous consumption, is a way of outwardly expressing internal states and processes. As we have seen, the notion of being an "ashtangi" is surrounded by certain dynamic and negotiable traits, behavioural guidelines, and norms concerning the correct attitude. Most want to be *yogis* rather than *bhogis*. As the practitioners delve further into the practice they appropriate and enfold more of the yogic traits and thus become more like yogis. This appropriation can be done intentionally or happen unconsciously, but both communicate and enact something. "Wanna-bees", if detected, are to some degree frowned upon and insincere students can be challenged, but it is also acknowledged that any reason for starting practicing yoga is good, because the truth will get them in the end. Although related, this seems a bit different from the experienced mountaineers on Everest, who are less indulgent with those who only try to scale the mountain because they have the money (Tumbat and Belk 2011). This difference rests on at least two things. Firstly, scaling Everest is far more dangerous than doing yoga, and one student's inexperience does not increase the risk of death and injury for others. The far harsher critique levelled at inadequate teacher trainings and the risk of doing harm by teaching supports this view. Secondly, there is an outspoken message in the yoga philosophy of contentment, non-harm, and harmony. Being too critical of others is deemed unyogic and thus speaks against one's own spiritual growth by yoga practice.

The paradox is that yoga, like other "ascetic" or anti-materialistic movements, itself has become an object of much commercial interest, not only by charging a lot of money for classes, but also for selling clothing, food supplements and other life style related goods. By becoming large movements, these counter- or sub-cultural movements themselves become the focus of commercial interest, and thus become entangled in the very structures they seek to defy. They become mainstream. Hippie chick has been a major fashion trend on several occasions in the decades since "the

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

dawn of the age of Aquarius” and H&M has had its ranges of punk apparel. Yoga has become a major economic field of interest.

In this, I have tried to establish yoga’s position within and as a culture of consumption, and I also explored the influence of money on a practice that most dedicated practitioners would rather talk of in terms of spirituality and personal development. The question of money ties into large issues in the Ashtanga yoga community about “authenticity” and the future of the practice, and many yoga practitioners try to guard the ‘use-values’ of the practice, which are *not* subsumed by money relations, by preserving or establishing barriers against economic spheres governed by money transactions. Though important in enabling to travel and “express” their dedication to the practice, there is uneasiness among the yoga students when it comes to the question of money and morality, especially in situations where they perceive illegitimate charges, either because it is just too costly, or when those who charge are seen as dubious against some criteria. They try instead to divert the flow of capital from short-term into long-term interchanges that will work towards the upkeep of the practice, in both its personal and communal guise. “Legitimate” and “ill-legitimate” interchanges related to the yoga practice lend significance to it and to “yoga” as a phenomenon in general. Such interchanges are partial in unfolding and enacting yoga as practice. As we have seen though, the morally infused borders between legitimacy and illegitimacy are hardly clear-cut, but rather defined by practitioners based on their experience and interpretation.

## Part four: Reconnections

... the human condition, although dramatic, is not desperate, since experiences themselves tend to deliver the spirit (especially by producing disgust with *samsara* and longing for renunciation). Indeed, it is only through *experiences* that freedom is gained. Hence the gods (*videha*, “the disincarnate”) – who have no experience because they have no body – are in a condition of existence inferior to the human condition and cannot attain complete liberation. (Eliade 2009: 40)

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

## 10: “Enjoying the mongrel”<sup>218</sup> or the topology of (yoga) practice

TOPOLOGY is a non-metric elastic geometry. It is concerned with transformation of shapes and properties such as nearness, inside and outside. (Paul Ryan, *Radical Software* 3) (Quoted in Brodey 1971: 4)

Imagine practicing yoga, taping it and then, afterwards, watching the tape of yourself practicing. Afterwards, you go back to practicing, and again tape it. You could even tape yourself watching the tape of yourself practicing, and then go back to the practice, incorporating all the insight you have gotten from watching yourself, and from the watching yourself watching yourself. Add to this, a host of other feedback, reflection, emotions, reading, seeing, etc., and enfold this into the practice, and this is basically how “a personal yoga practice” evolves, unfolds and manifests. This is usually also how anthropological texts and theses evolve, unfold and manifest, but this fact is mostly belied by the linear shape that they (mostly) have by the time they are read. The same holds for this thesis. Though, I think, and also, to some degree, hope, that it retains some traces of the process of its becoming. Anthropology as yoga does not come about in straight ways, but rather in a dynamic process where a myriad of phenomena, relationships, coincidences, revelations, sympathies and antipathies play their part, both in the field and at the desk, as well as, in lecture halls, at lunch tables and on bus trips. Both yoga practices, and anthropology, spring from whole human beings and their meetings with and presence in life.

As Kovach (2002) ascertains, “our awareness of the unified mass of this lived body” (Kovach 2002: 948) is a sense of fundamental physicality given through the body’s response to everyday forces such as gravity and inertia that the mass of our bodies resist. Our sense of material selfhood – “... of objecthood, substantiality, and wholeness...” (ibid.) – is accordingly proprioceptual “... constituting the mere awareness of our unitary bodily physicality” (Kovach 2002: 948). By doing *asana*, bodily orientation is manipulated, and gravity challenged. Thus the exploration of and

---

<sup>218</sup> Paraphrasing Nanda (2011b).

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

experimentation with the body and our senses’ proprioceptual basis might lead to more conscious ways of being bodies in the world. This can happen although the fundamentality of this proprioception might not be conscious(-ly arrived at).

As Nevrin (2008) argues, Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) can be a source for change and empowerment since

... postural practice in MPY may allow the practitioners to change his or her qualitative use of movement: weight distribution, effort, temporality, the coordinated use of parts, and so on. This also includes a heightened attention to feeling movement itself, which will typically alter the practitioner’s sense of self and body and invite for a variety of reflections regarding the nature and significance of this change. (Nevrin 2008: 124-125)

How the whole body is oriented in space will influence our perception of our environment. Sound, scent, feeling, and sight, as well as experience of how the body is located in space, all have impact on our being in the world. The body’s location includes balance, any physical unease, orientations of up and down, right and left – all goes into informing us of our surroundings.

Liberman (2008) agrees with such notions, and links yoga’s life-changing power in a Western context to our notions of body and self. As has been argued throughout this thesis, yoga has a certain resonance in the Western world since body and self have become projects for realisation and existential security. Such self-centred habits can actually be an advantage according to Liberman (2008) because “... self-centeredness will not subside without some trials” (2008: 112). He continues that prostration can be a tool for learning humility, pointing out that when practices such as yoga pushes one beyond one ordinarily accepted boundaries of life this can create reflection. One’s own agenda is put in perspective, and one can see how small it truly is.

Yoga as an encompassing philosophy fits the self-projects of “bettering bodies” into a larger meaningful whole. Health and fitness is not sought for its own sake within this context, at least not theoretically, but as part of an enlightenment and salvation (of self) project. In yoga the focus on development or realisation of self, which has gained so much importance in high modernity, can be fitted into a context of higher



religious or spiritual meaning. The project is no longer a project of self-aggrandisement, but rather (can be termed as) a project of religio-spiritual asceticism and (moral) cleansing. Juggling self-projects and a religious/spiritual practice is of course not easy and clear-cut, and there are constant negotiations within the yoga community about what is the correct way of practicing. There is, of course, also the challenge of outwardly “proving” own spiritual growth – and the body can be a vehicle here as well (as in doing advanced *asana* or behaving the correct way (not showing off etc.)).

As such yoga can create awareness of one’s own body and one’s own habitual ways of being, and thus the practice embodies a potential for reflection and change. As Nevrin (2008) argues, it is a way of directing attention inwards into one’s own body. As he says, we always direct our attention somewhere, which means that we simultaneously direct it *away* from something else. Directing our attention elsewhere makes other objects stand out from the horizon (Fyhn 2011). As attention skills are habit-dependent, being forced to change the direction of our attention – as for instance in yoga practice – might alter our habits, and thus our ways of being in the world. Changing our habits can be a way of altering the ingrained schemata (Riegler 2007) of our cognitive systems.

Through the physical practice of yoga the students are inscribed into yoga as a tradition, and that practice is also inscribed on their bodies. As they move deeper into the practice, they move beyond the merely physical practice of *asana*, and are pulled into and immersed in a deeper discourse of how and why. Especially in Mysore, it is hard to stay completely clear of the more moral and philosophical aspects of the practice, as these are the topics of most of the conferences, and also in breakfast conversations and in books on yoga. Everywhere, the students are caught by droplets of philosophical knowledge and are encouraged to search within their own experience of the practice and life in general for parallels and evidence for it. Older students and teachers “help” and socialize (younger) students into recognizing the “correct” experience of the practice. And if you do not understand: “Just do your practice, and everything will come!” Answers and insights are promised at a later stage of practice. Although much of the teaching in yoga is based on anatomical descriptions and pointers to how to best perform the *asana* – ground your feet, do not lift your head,

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

point your toes – the reason for doing the *asana* in the first place is rooted in the yoga philosophy and the students are constantly encouraged to look towards it.

As the students delve deeper into their practices – as the schemata surrounding the practice gain more importance – yoga is made relevant for an increasing part of their lives, and to some degree a wider circle of elements colours and is coloured by the practice. At the same time, ever more elements are enrolled as relevant for the practice. That is, they unfold subtler, more powerful, aspects, which envelope and enfold more and more “external” elements. Ever more aspects gain significance in light of the practice – both inwards in the physical experience of body, and outwards in their social surroundings in processes of soma-signification (Bohm 1995). Ashtanga yoga in the tradition of Pattabhi Jois is as such a living, evolving tradition, although some students tend to forget this in their everyday practice, and just claim that yoga is thousands of years old. That the practice is old is true, to some degree, in being a tradition with ancient roots. However, it is also somewhat wrong as the practice is ever reinvented, and because “yoga” is a term that embraces much more than just the *asana* sequence taught in the Shala, and even much more than just Ashtanga in the tradition of Patañjali.

The implications of my argument throughout this thesis stretch well beyond explaining the development of yoga practice, as has hopefully been clear. Importantly, I would claim that this way of unfolding practice, knowledge and being in the world is not relevant only for yoga as a practice, but for any practice, and also for just being. This is being human. As such, this also has implications for anthropology, anthropological practice, and anthropological knowledge.

We do our research, not only because we want to know about others, but also because it makes us aware of, and therefore, it makes us reflect upon, our own situation. Knowledge of others fosters awareness of self. There is a long tradition of doing research on “other cultures” in order to learn, to say something of or make a critique of “our own society” in social anthropology. Two famous examples are, of course, Margaret Mead’s “Coming of Age in Samoa” (2001) and Ruth Benedict’s “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword” (1989). Both aim heavy artillery at the American society of their days. Being imminently “modern”, we strive for individuality, and

because of some loss in the faith in modernity this quest is pronounced by striving for the true and authentic self. In the study of religion there has been a change in interest from religion to spirituality, where spirituality entails a subjective turn inwards (Heelas 2005). The notion of authenticity seems central in these regards. The turn is towards subjectivity, that is, the source of truth, authority and significance. The subjective-life is "...life lived in deep connection with the unique experience of my self-in-relation" (Heelas 2005: 3). One of the goals of such a life is to come to full awareness of being, which is another parallel to both the phenomenologically founded anthropology and the practice of yoga. Anthropology, spirituality and religion all turn the attention towards the self, the subject, experience and the body. All focus on who we really are and how to become our true selves. All fit easily into the same reality and to some degree share strategies of method assemblage. All are played out against the same hinterlands (Law 2004). But in anthropology the question of the "subject" is somewhat puzzling as "research" supposedly should be "objective". This is illustrated by "participant observation" as a rather challenging game.

The anthropological notion of participant observation is paradoxical. Though the paradox is not necessarily inherent in the two terms themselves, as there is a wide variety of ways they can relate to each other, for instance in a movement between observation and participation in time. The greater paradox can be found in the application of this anthropological claim to fame, and marker of identity, which supposedly separates "us" from "them" in the highways and byways of academic life. We live with "the others" and participate with our whole being, and the goal is to live as much as possible as "they" do, and simultaneously observe (Follo 2008). The in-depth knowledge and understanding stemming from immersion in participation is emphasized as the main strength, and defining trait of anthropology. The paradox lies in the double message that can be found in the ideal of "gaining the natives' point of view" (Malinowski 1922) – we should live their reality – on the one hand, and the problem of "going native" or doing anthropology at home, on the other. The message seems to be that we should get as close as possible, but at the same time keep our distance so not to endanger the scholar's perspective. Though, "methodological reflections" upon own involvement is a compulsory exercise in anthropological texts, and has been endorsed since the introspective turn of the 60s and 70s (e.g., Clifford & Marcus 1986; Marcus & Fischer 1999), we should not end up digging into our own

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

navels in our attempt to make sense of our own involvement in the lives of others. Our tales should not be subjective stories of our own involvement, but rather “objective”, which implies keeping a certain distance. This paradox is heightened by the fact that the only tools we have in approaching the worlds of others are our own bodies. It is only through our bodies that can we participate in the world.

The “traditional” anthropological ideas end up cautioning against both too deep participation and too distanced observation, endorsing switching between the two so as to strengthening both, and thus end up somewhere in the grey shadings in between the two extremes. Because of the warnings that exist against going native and doing anthropology at home – warnings usually clothed in the danger for loosing “distance” – the largest challenge seems to lie at the “participation” side of the spectrum (though anthropologists *in spe* are also cautioned against too philosophical speculations not rooted in empirical “facts”). The challenge is partly inherent in linear thinking, which locates pure participation and pure observation on each end of a spectrum, the stretching of which makes the two increasingly harder to coalesce.

Follo (2008) writes that the researcher never can have the same experience as the people who are a part of the research. Since the researcher should not only participate, but also observe, this is a double perspective that separates the researcher from those he or she studies. As Hastrup (2005) says, the anthropological observer and the native participant cannot exist simultaneously, and native anthropology is a contradiction of term. According to her, there is no way in which we at the same time can speak from the inside and from the outside – this is logically not possible. Whether at home or abroad, anthropologists deal with othering, either by studying others or by assuming the position of the other themselves – there is a play of distancing and perspective (Hastrup 2005). Hastrup further argues that anthropological practice presupposes such a breach. If there were to be such a thing as a “native” anthropology, the social space studied and the endeavour for anthropological knowledge would need to essentially be the same. She argues:

For the anthropological results to be theoretically and historically significant, one must reflect upon the objective conditions for the production of knowledge itself. For the native there is no way of incorporating such an objective viewpoint and still speak as ‘native’. (Hastrup 2005:

159)

As such, a native anthropologist will cease to hold the native point of view “as anthropologist”, since the anthropological gaze will always add something to the native reality. If it did not, it would be worthless. In Follo’s (2008) wording, what the researcher observes and the experience in the participation is enfolded in his earlier experience and understanding, and the stranger the culture that is studied is, the greater the discrepancy to the “native” could be.

The anthropological knowledge is forged by the dual vision of insider/participant and outsider/observer, by having two points of view, what Bateson (2000, 2002) calls double description. But it is not only the dual vision that is crucial. Desjarlais further argues that it is through being and feeling this contrast one learns “... noting the differences that make a difference” (Desjarlais 1992: 19), which again is a rather obvious reference to Bateson (e.g., 2000d)<sup>219</sup>. Desjarlais continues:

By participating in the everyday life of a society distinct from one’s own, an ethnographer confronts and slowly learns (often tacitly but always partially) patterns of behaviour previously unfamiliar to his or her body. In my experience, it is through this behavioural reworking that the differences characterizing two forms of life become most apparent. (Desjarlais 1992: 19)

Anthropological knowledge springs from “behavioural reworking”, just like reflection in yoga practice unfolds from “change in qualitative us of movement” (Nevrin 2008: 124-125), which stems from participation in practice. By being part of two (or more) worlds, we gain some elevation and an outside view – if not an *objective* viewpoint, whatever that might imply – in addition to the insider perspectives, and in this dualism lays the foundation of our knowledge. As West puts it, there is an “... urge to somehow get outside that world, to move beyond it in order to gain perspective on it,

---

<sup>219</sup> It is important to note here that the need for a dual vision for gaining knowledge is not only the case for anthropologists, but also for the creation of knowledge in general. The yogis to be might gain a (re)new(ed) understanding of the world, and particularly, of themselves, in the journey to India, and the practice of yoga – perhaps in turning the world literally on the head in the headstand. This parallels the “traditional” understanding of (the movement through) ritual (Turner 1979, 1997; Langøien 2006) and other hedge riders – as Duerr (1991) labels the witches of the Middle ages, who were riding on the fence between civilisation and the wilderness. We are not that different from how we interpret our “objects” of study – we are located bodies as much as they are.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

to formulate a transcendent vision of it” (West 2007: 80). And please note, in order to “get outside” and “move beyond” you need to first – or at least at some point – have been on the inside. Without having been on the inside the movement could not happen. Are conditions for production of knowledge ever objective, as Hastrup (2005) seemingly requests? Based Riegler’s (2007) postulate that we are knowledge *producers* rather than “mere processors”, we could answer no. “Subject” and “object” always participate in the same whole, and each other. “Objects” are a part of us and our creation. As such, we are always all “natives”, and, though we need to subject the production of “objectivity” to inquiry, we need to create the distancing and “othering” in ourselves, by deep participation in the realities of others (as much as possible) and through reflection, also upon our own participation and body. Anthropology at home, then, ceases to be suspect. It is in this movement between realities, in the (embodied) experience of different worlds, in establishing perspective, that knowledge is created – that is, if there is reflection (Dewey 2005). It is only in the transcendence to a higher order of reality that comparison can even be made (Johansen 2008). As “geographers” in the topological realities of human practices, anthropology might be the answer to Law’s (2004) request for “... ways of exploring the enactment of and the interactions between different realities” (Law 2004: 122).

The studying subject needs to be deeply immersed in the object of study on the one hand, and gain analytical distance on the other oneself and one’s own body, as one in deep immersion has been enfolded, also from as a part of the wholeness of the object of study. As such, being a part of one’s own field of study is not the main challenge and should instead be seen as an advantage. Rather, the task is to attain the necessary analytical distance so as to not ending up with just describing and analysing oneself, but instead the wholeness one is a part of, as well as the aspects of that wholeness one has not been a part of.

The logical consequence of endorsing the anthropological tenets to their fullest would be stretching both the participation and the observation as far as imaginable to create as much room for reflection “between” them as possible. In such a span the potential for creating significant insight would be larger.

Once we have learned to see both Necker cube both ways<sup>220</sup>, an irreversible process of learning occur and we are *no longer able* to see the cube in only one way. Rather our perception after a moment will switch to the other cube. The perception of the cube as a whole takes on a dynamic form, where the perception fluctuates between the two static 3D variants. As a whole, this perception is thus of a higher dimensional order than 3D, and it is supra-physical and procedural. In this perception of the cube, its back and front side are alternately turned inside out from each other (Johansen 2004). The wholeness of the cube cannot be perceived without involvement in it by focused defocusing, where without negating the distinction between the sides one can come to the see the faces as inside and simultaneously outside where “... the complete interpenetration of opposites is embodied” (Rosen 1994: 124). By meta-reflection one can thus come to the insight that one is an aspect of the Necker cube as a whole. The object ceases to be “merely out there”. Objects cannot stand out and manifest without something else becoming the background against which they stand out. There has to be a horizon (Fyhn 2011). Additionally, it has to stand out for *someone*, i.e., there has to be a *subject*. Someone – or something (as it does not have to be a “living” thing) – has to perceive this as a difference. The notion of an object is dependent on something being different from something else, which again depend on some kind of border. By nature, borders are relative, and it is the subject that applies its immanent borders on the object (Johansen 2008). We create the borders. The borders are internal to the subject. Thus, the subject and object are not fundamentally separate, but rather intimately intertwined.

Against such a background, “objectivity” in research is paradoxical, since the objects that are studied are dependent on the subject observing them. This means that knowing the object and knowing “the knowing subject” is actually part of the same process. The Klein bottle methodology that has been sketched – albeit mostly implicitly – throughout this thesis, is thus not something I consider as threatening to the anthropological endeavour. Rather it is both the ontological fundament that makes “traditional” anthropological methodology and phenomenological theory and methodology significant, *and* the logical consequence of taking anthropological and phenomenological methodology serious in its fullest sense. “... the Klein Bottle is the

---

<sup>220</sup> See page 201, chapter 6.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

embodiment of a self-referential topology and the working of the mind and reality as a whole” (Rapoport 2011: 46). The ontology of the Klein bottle has been a catalyst for a host of discoveries and theoretical developments in logic, informatics, photon physics, cybernetics and genetics, just to mention some areas, in Rapoport’s (2011) work in later years. Today the ontology of the Klein bottle has massive scientific backing, as it has led to scientific results that would not have been possible without it. The Klein bottle’s surface is “... open and closed, continuous and discontinuous, inside and outside are fused, since it has a single side” (ibid.). The uncontained part can be seen as the subject, the contained part as the object, and the containing part as space or context (Rapoport 2011). It supersedes the dichotomy of interpreter and interpreted (ibid.).

Instead of just alternating between participation/presence and observation/distance, I would argue for going *through* in-depth immersion in participation. By boring deep into being present and participation, and entering and being enfolded in the realities of those we study, their “perspective” can be inscribed on our bodies and pushing through this participation we can transcend it and gain perspective for “observation” *beyond* participation. This would not entail navel-gazing, but rather going in through the navel, and our own body, getting to know how the realities in which we are submerged shape it. As we participate through body, it is only through the body we can know (and thus create) reality, be it our own or that “of others” – though they become our own as we are inscribed by them.

We unfold our senses into the world, and enfold the world into our bodies. We contain the world simultaneously as we are contained by it. At the same time, the world enfolds us, and is enfolded in us, in continuous Klein bottle movements. Of the Klein bottle, Brodey (1971) writes:

The part that loops out into the environment – the unanticipated context – recurs through itself comparing the return with the rhythmic response on adjacent recursions. It changes the waveform to better maintain its intentional behaviour. It is permeated by context. It has no walls. Yet it uses its structural infolding for maintaining itself changing in a sufficiently regular way to find new relations. (Brodey 1971: 4)



Relationships are not dyadic – consisting of an inside and an outside – but at least triadic, in embracing context. As such the description of the Klein bottle could equally be a description of the human body, yoga practice or anthropology as practice. They all are maintained, but also changing in continuous interaction with the surroundings and internal process, ever unfolding, and embodying apparent dichotomies in larger wholes. By its characteristics, the Klein bottle topology embodies Bohm’s (1995) soma-signification, and the unfolding of ever-subtler levels. The ontology of the Klein bottle (e.g., Rapoport 2011; Rosen 1994) – as well as Bohm’s (1995) theories on soma-significance – are also compatible with and adds fundamental theoretical insights to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (2002) and his notion of experience and being in the world (and thus also to most phenomenologically inclined anthropology). This kinship is acknowledged by both Rosen (1994: xviii) and Rapoport (2011).

The Klein bottle is the gathering topological figure that the different aspects of both anthropological and yoga practice are folded in to and out of. In both practices, my body and I become the bottle, which something is folded into. In this thesis and doctoral project, the Klein bottle also is the structure by which yoga and anthropological practice and my experience of both are enfolded in each other, though “the anthropological part” is the enfolding part – the containing outside part – which has the main seat in the presentation. The “yoga part of me” is crucial though, not as “the other end of the spectrum”, but as an infolded part of the whole. There are thus within the whole, several sub-wholes in which the larger whole participate. Though a figure-ground reversal, or a “turn of the bottle”, yoga *could* become the face of the story, just like the Necker cube switch where front and background changes place. They are both inherent part of the same whole. In Klein bottle methodology, using oneself and own immersion in practice become a boon to the research effort.

There are many reasons for practicing yoga today, and I would presume that the number approximates the number of practitioners, at least if we were to divide the reasons in detailed categories. As for yoga’s appeal, it is first of all worth keeping in mind the wide meaning of the term ‘yoga’, which makes “yoga” an extremely flexible practice. In general though, yoga is surrounded by a terminology that resonates quite well with today’s focus on being true to oneself, reconnecting with the body, listening

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

to the body, and basically finding oneself. There is a lot of self-nourishment baked into this vocabulary, and it applies to stressed people with back-problems. Yoga is “sold” as a self-care package and a cure-all. In addition, many styles of yoga cater to the body conscious among us, as a rigorous yoga practice not only is a calming moment in our hectic lives, but also a physical exercise that shapes the body to societal standards of fitness and beauty. It is my impression that most yoga practitioners today practice yoga as a physical exercise. Thus, yoga is a full-fledged body project of exercise, dieting, and self-care. In addition, though yoga is a religio-spiritual practice and system of philosophy that caters to people of a more spiritual yearning. The terminology of self- and re-connection points to higher goals than the fit body. The broad spectrum of the practice makes it possible for a wide range of people with equally varied motivations to find some rhythm in the practice that they can sway to without adjusting their own rhythm too much. Once inside, if the practice still resounds with the melody of their heart, they keep adding beats, voices, and ever more complex rhythms, until everyone is approximating the same rhythm and melody, as well as adding their own interpretation to the ensemble. They become one with the practice, and the practice becomes one with them, and they keep unfolding ever more subtle nuances in the wholeness that is their personal yoga practice, as well as shaping and being shaped by the bigger whole of the yoga community.

As *asana* practice is a physical endeavour, the body has a central place in the practice. The centrality of the body is seen in conversations and the way it and the physical aspects of the practice are talked about. These conversations also act as reflections and negotiations on the centrality of body, as well as the relation between personal experience of yoga and yoga as a social practice. Yoga is a socially influenced personal practice, as well as a social practice influenced by personal experience. Both these aspects are vital in creating, enacting and manifesting yoga. Yoga has to be practiced and experienced to be fully understood, and as the students delve deeper into and commit more to the practice they learn to experience more aspects of the practice. The flip-side of this is equally true as the students seek the meaning of and tries to understand the experiences they have on the mat. What the students experience due to their practice is empowerment, healing and transformation, just to mention a few. Physical change becomes a booster for further studies, a way to gauge progress, and a testament to the powers of the practice. As the mind, and even more

so the soul, are intangible entities, the body in its externality, for the students becomes the object to be controlled and evolved as a way to reach the more subtle aspects of the self. As the aspiring yogis put it, yoga facilitates the reconnection of body and mind, as well as an awareness of this connection. As Paula says, she “gained body” through the practice, it became her body, and her to inhabit and control. Control of one’s own body becomes vital in a world where loss of control seems to be a prevalent feeling. Starting with the altered relation to one’s own body – becoming aware of body and present in existence – it become easier to reach out, take control of and inhabit the world. Yoga should not end with(-in) the body, but the body should rather be a stepping-stone – something to be mastered – on the way to controlling and releasing the self. In yoga, the body is healed, mastered and eventually transcended.

Through the practice the students get an embodied understanding of yoga, and physically experience change. The yoga practice can be a concrete experience and view of what *can and should* be. Being a time-out, the students can both get another perspective of their lives, and experience another “reality”. For instance feelings of flow, nothingness and connection can make the students realise the possibility of different ways of being, seeing and living. In the eyes of the students, the reality of the yoga teachings can be felt and thus “proven” to be true. The experience of alterity on the mat can for others lead to seeking literature or more advanced practitioners for the meaning of these experiences. Physical manipulation of the body has a proprioceptive impact on the body, and thus adopting new practices can alter how the world is perceived. Like liminality, the experience of the practice can strengthen the belief in the philosophy supporting the *asana* practice. Additionally, it can break up the taken-for-grantedness of life and body, and send yoga students chasing answers that fit *their* new experiences better, which might lead them deeper into the practice or make them break away from it.

The observant reader will, of course, object that such changes in bodily and mental dispositions by this argument can be gained from any change of practice, which is obviously true. The argument implies something about physical practices and training in general, as these insights are not relevant to yoga only. Any appropriation of an exercise regime will inherently change the movement of the body, and thus these practices have an impact on the rest of the practitioner’s life. Any change of practice,

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

and any change in bodily disposition, from change of gait to major bodily trauma, might or will probably lead to some change of habitual thought patterns and thus experience (of the world). Why then focus on yoga? Why not focus on any other form of physical exercise, in order to try to establish how exercise can and will have an impact on mental, psychological and emotional aspects of life and living it? Could any of the practitioners I have interviewed have gotten the same awareness of self through any other avenue? Probably, though quite a few have come to Ashtanga by different highways and byways, of both physical exercise, therapy and substance use and abuse, and have thus tried to come to where they are by these methods. Yoga fosters change partly because the philosophy itself has come to be a champion of betterment and self-refinement. Both in a traditional Indian setting, and in a modern “Western” setting, change and transformation are central images the practice is evolved around. Thus, when entering a yoga practice, the budding practitioner also enters what might be called an idiom of change. That being said, though, my exposition on religion and unfolding the subtle in Chapter 8 indicates that yoga as an ‘estate’ of comprehensive *religare* conceptions, binding and gathering the ‘corporation’, in the context of the dedicated students in Mysore, potentially is superiorly significant as an interface to a more all-embracing “religious” state of holiness/wholeness. This might be “powered” by the terminology and intentions with which the practice is surrounded, which explicitly aims at going beyond and transcending the immediate limitations of body.

Basically yoga is a practice that those who practice it and choose to stay with it find meaningful – in all the connotations of the word that has been sketched throughout this thesis – and not least a practice that they can continue to unfold the significance of, adding layers and manifesting larger sphere of relevance and connectivity.

“The personal practice” – enfolding the notion of praxis, which is the confluence of theory and practice – unfolds in the interchanges between me and my body (and all my previous experience), the physical practice and the theory or philosophy of yoga. Additionally the physical body is the tool for the practice, though also *being* me, the practice – in all aspects – can only be approached and understood through the body. Mediating between the philosophy and me, the yoga community helps in the interpretations of the philosophy, and is partial in making the philosophy significant

and applicable to life in general. The teachers are also part of this mediation. The teachers also mediate between my/the practice and the philosophy, and are central in making sense of the practice, especially the more transcendent messages, as well as elevating the practice from mere exercise. It is worth keeping in mind here that the yoga community – the social – especially in Mysore, includes a lot of yoga teachers, as such these two “categories” are at least partly interchangeable. The yoga community here additionally connotes the “global” community of yoga practitioners that is encountered in Mysore, the “Cybershala”, magazines and countless other places. As we have seen the body and physical experience of the practice – getting a fit body and mastering advanced *asana* – can be counter to and stand in the way of philosophical understanding and the more spiritual goals of the practice. In similar fashion, being too social and the social life in Mysore can be a nuisance and keep people from really reflecting upon yoga and the practice. And finally my ego can crash with the ego of the teachers. Though a somewhat schematic representation, based on Follo’s (2008) “mediating triangle”, it is in the dynamic interchange between such categories yoga as a practice unfolds. The “mediating triangle” is a model for and an attempt at capturing and expressing “weird connections” (Follo 2008). The triangle holds two dialectical movements. One is of the “framing” aspects, and the other of the mediating elements. The essential focus of the triangle is connections and relationships, but tension and opposition are also given space as parts of the dynamic unfolding of significance. In the interchanges, negotiations, and mediations between the elements balance is sought and change can occur. Change in one aspect is significant for the others, requires reflection, can be somatised and thus foster change in both sub-wholes, and the whole “system”. Reversing the two triangles – the mediating inner triangle taking the place of larger outer one – represents recontextualisation, and throughout my thesis, the triangle has been somewhat inversed, elevating mediating categories of “body”, the community, and the global debate. In this reversal the practice has nevertheless been the main motif. All these aspects are part of the same whole, and as I have been trying to say something about how the practice is manifested and unfolds, it has been vital to focus on the enfolded aspects, or the contained part of the Klein bottle movement, which are what the containing part “unfolds from”.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Anthropology as a practice, a methodological ideal and a theoretical approach(es) unfolds in a similar manner (Follo 2008) as the yoga practice. Anthropology, as an academic endeavour, is not an isolated practice of participant observation (method), on one hand, and pared with theory, on the other. Theory, field experience and methodological considerations are intimately bound to social settings, which can also be academic, one’s own experience, both in the field and in academia, and one’s “personal” life. There is a dynamic interplay between these aspects, and they enfold into and unfold from each other.

If it is true, as I have claimed, that through the practice of yoga, the students effect changes in their lives by reenacting (Mol 2002) yoga bodies and creating their own realities, this, and the theoretical foundations I have built my argument upon, ought to yield some more general implications on anthropological research and the creation of anthropological realities. As anthropologists, we ought to understand that the opportunities and limitations we perceive in the life of “the others” are also present in our own lives. In trying to understand human interactions, we often forget to include our own lives in our conclusion, and we overlook the implications that our findings have for our own realities. Notions such as “embodiment” (Merleau-Ponty 2002), “cognition as organisationally closed” (Riegler 2007), “unfolding of meaning” (Bohm 1995), just to mention a few of the theoretical stands I have touched upon, are equally valid for our own endeavours and our “being-in-the-world”, as it is for the yoga students I have written about. As anthropologists, we create the anthropological reality by our methods.

Participation, observation and theory building go hand in hand, and are enfolded in each other in such a way that *one* point of departure cannot be found. Yoga students build their practice and their understanding in the same fashion as anthropologists build their practice and understanding. In both instances, surprises and “breaches” force and invite new theory building. Being shaken out of habitual thinking and behaviour encourages reflection.

There are many ways to do research and to theorise one’s findings, but some things hold true for all research. We enter our fields with some preconceptions of what is important and what we are going to find. No one is a blank slate. Instead, we are

formed by our backgrounds and training. Although our theories are to bloom from our empirical findings, those findings are curtailed by paradigmatic walls. In Dewey's words, "... the ways in which we believe and expect have a tremendous affect upon what we believe and expect" (Dewey 1958: 14; see also Law 2004). As I am phenomenologically bent, notions of experience, embodiment, being-in-the-world and body are important tools for conceptualising my surroundings. I experience the world as a body based on reflection upon previous experience – this is my human predicament. The body is situated in a nexus of different phenomena that are feeding into the experience – nodes mediating between different levels and realities. These are arenas of interaction and friction. Awareness of this can be turned into a tool for further anthropological inquiry, as the embodiment of new realities create differences and experience thereof. The perception and experience of differences that make a difference are the foundation of knowledge. In embodying and enacting the realities of others as best we can, we might gain an understanding of those realities – as well as, a further awareness of the taken-for-granted aspects of our own life-worlds.

Importantly, though, to say that yoga students – and we as anthropologists – create and construct their/our own realities is not to deny the "reality" and genuineness of their world and practice – and nor of the anthropological endeavour. Rather it is a way of giving the lived practice a reality and authenticity beyond the meagre bickering of historicity, debates of authentic or non-authentic practices, or what "real" yoga is. Rather than evaluating "authenticity", we tend to what they *do* and a living *unfolding* reality. Anthropology is the same. And for both the significance of knowledge and practice change – "We see what we attend to!" (Riegler 2007.) We – or any cognitive system – do not, *first*, filter relevant from irrelevant information that is gushing at us from outside. We *make* the relevant information as we go on. We learn, choose, experience and change.

We as anthropologists are not *that* different from the people we choose to study, and although we, from time to time, manage to get a foot in the door of other "cultures" and as such are "insiders" we are at the same time outsiders by choice and nature. This does not mean that we are outside the flow of time (and space), hovering above everything and being capable "objective" descriptions of others who are too deeply ingrained in things to know what it is they are really doing. It is rather arrogant to

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

assume that we are over and above the ebb and flow of the history and politics that, we say, influence and guide the actions of our “informants” or “objects of study”. We are, just as everybody else, bodies in the world, and, as such, “products” of our environment – be it bush or academia. Our hinterlands frame our perception. We are situated bodies. There is a great need to see and acknowledge our own situatedness and connections so that that we may be more capable of seeing not only how others create their realities, but also how we create our own. We, as everybody else, create our realities by way of approaching and being in the world – through method (assemblage). Through our actions, we create and recreate our surroundings. This makes it vital that we as researchers are highly conscious of how we enter into the realities of others, and how those realities might differ from ours. By embodying other realities, and, at the same time, keeping “our own” anthropological reality, we can see the enactment and interactions of other realities. Being bodies, experiencing everything as body, further makes awareness of our own body, how we move, stand, sit and everything else, as well as how new surroundings change our posture, very important. This is doubly true in the study of body practices. On the flip side, practice much focused on the body can help us become conscious of our bodies as the main tool for being in the world. Yoga can create an awareness of the body that might be helpful in entering a new field. Such humility and self-reflective recognition ought to be prevalent if we are to reach anthropological understandings that are also intended to reach *beyond* and realise anything in *addition* to this recognition.

At the bottom line, the anthropologist is a human, so the same Law<sup>221</sup> should apply to us as to those we try to become in our research.

---

<sup>221</sup> Pun intended.



“This isn’t touchy feely yoga. This is Ashtanga.”

## 11: Epilogue: “This isn’t touchy-feely yoga. This is Ashtanga.”<sup>222</sup>

... as an Indian writer has pointed out, it is possible that in the not too distant future if the Indian wants to learn about India he will have to consult the West, and if the West wants to remember how they were, they will have to come to us [e.g., India].

This is also known as rock and roll. (Mehta 1994; 192)

Whatever faults these practitioners find in yoga practice, the fault mostly, in their view, is not to be found within yoga as a system or tradition. Yoga as an ancient system, and as an idea, is, for the most part, faultless, and any problems are tied to concrete manifestations of this ideal system. The trouble can be found in themselves, as in “this wasn’t right for me right now” or “I didn’t listen to my own body,” with a concrete way of teaching yoga, as in George’s experience of Ashtanga yoga as taught in Mysore, or perhaps the source for any fault is a specific teacher, who is not capable of covering the personal needs of their students. “Yoga”, as such, is not to be blamed for any injury or other kind of trouble the practice entails; it is, rather, the way that it is practiced or there are wrong interpretations that might lead one astray. For most of the people I have met over the course of my research, Ashtanga yoga holds some of this position as infallible. Ashtanga yoga, as it “should” be or used to be, or Ashtanga as a system, is “all good”, but people tend to have the wrong intentions or the wrong focus into it, thus corrupting the practice in one way or the other. Yoga is perfect, but man is not. Some laud the age of Guruji and his teaching as the golden age when the practice was as it should be, with few students under his close attention (The Confluence Countdown authors being a good example though they never went to Mysore during those days). These people might also look to Guruji’s older students for guidance, and in them see the true flame and teaching of Ashtanga. Others look to Sharath and Saraswathi, and take the Shala – which was built by Guruji – as their source of the true Ashtanga practice. The question underlying these “choices” of allegiance, are the question of who holds the correct interpretation of Ashtanga yoga, rather than whether yoga in general and Ashtanga in particular are beneficiary.

---

<sup>222</sup> (TCC 3)

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

As such, many safety measures are built into any yoga practice. When yoga is questioned, as in the NYT article “How yoga wrecks your body,” there is first of all not only one practice that bears the name of “yoga,” and it is certainly not just the physical practice of *asana*, though that is the most common association. If yoga wrecks your body, you are doing it wrong, is the main answer. Either you are doing a style of yoga that does not suit you or you are not listening to your body and pushing yourself too hard. You are too ambitious when it comes to mastering *asanas*, or you are just too preoccupied with exercise. Maybe your teacher is not qualified to teach, or has just done a quick course to become a yoga instructor for the sake of fame or fortune? In any case, yoga is not just about *asana*, but is, rather, a complete charter for a more harmonious life, and if you do not follow the guidelines of the *yamas* and *niyamas* – and thus do not practice, for instance, *ahimsa* and *santosha* – how can you blame yoga for the mishaps that befall you? And in any case, an injury can be a great teacher if you only take it seriously, and take to heart what made you hurt yourself in the first place. Your practice comes from you; you make it what it is.

Every single manifestation of the Ashtanga yoga practice – though heavily influenced by and based on some interpretation of the teachings of Guruji, Sharath or some of their students – is a unique combination of (these) elements – personal experience, social context and global discourse. These elements are again, and in their turn, uniquely combined in every single practitioner meeting them. Based on one’s own experience, each practitioner will fit the elements into his or her own practice, and thus Ashtanga yoga practices might be made up of the same “matter” – which is the wrong word since there is mostly no matter to these things, though as they are all bodies, there is some truth to it as well, but how these are combined and what meaning they are given, vary. As the practitioners draw on different sources, inspirations, ideas and ideologies *outside* the Ashtanga philosophy and make these an “organic” part of their practice, the practices further take on different hues. That being said, they all draw on the same practice and vocabulary of Ashtanga yoga, and through doing the same practice, in the form of the *asana* they also gain a common language and develop a certain sympathy and empathy for each other through the common practice. There are enough similarities to make most Ashtanga yoga students recognise something of themselves in others, and something of their own practice in

“This isn’t touchy feely yoga. This is Ashtanga.”

the practice of the others, to make up a certain communality. If that had not been the case, they probably would not have sought out the same practice and *stayed* with it.

If certain empathy was not developed, the anthropological project could not be realised, as this is based on the same foundational assumption that a common practice can lead to some kind of common understanding of the world and of being-in-the-world. As such, it is foundational in all human relations. Although, we each have our bodies, and our own unique experiences of the world in which we live, we also have the ability to approach and approximate somebody else’s experiences in shared practice, and by empathically reaching out to these people.

To me, the real beauty of yoga practice – including Ashtanga yoga practice – is that even though people turn to the practice for so many different reasons, many of them actually find what they are looking for. Some get even more than they bargained for, establishing life long relationships to yoga – and not only *asana* practice. Yoga practice becomes *significant* in various ways, and it instigates change, transformation and commitment. The bickering that sometimes – some would probably say “constantly” – takes place, both within and between yoga styles, can best be seen/interpreted as the practitioners’ deep commitment to *their* personal practice and chosen method of practicing, and illustrates how “yoga practice” unfolds within the life and experience of every one of its adherents.

Up until autumn 2008, I was teaching yoga at Zenit Yoga in Trondheim, and I had been teaching at the Student Service in Trondheim (SiT) for a couple of years. I did not teach for that long at Zenit, but I felt confident, and it seemed that the students liked my style of teaching. The feedback was good. I practiced a few years before getting into teaching, and teaching was not really something I aspired to do, but I was asked if I was interested to take the classes at SiT, and after some consideration I said yes. It was the same at Zenit. It was not really something I planned to do, but when I was asked if I was interested I said yes. I liked teaching, and the positive feedback, both from students and other teachers, gave me some confidence doing it. My fieldwork experience changed my view of teaching yoga. One thing was my knee injury. I did not really feel comfortable to go back to teaching with knee troubles, both because I would not be able to show all the postures, and also because it just felt

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

weird. I kind of wanted to focus on my own practice, and trying to fix my knee to some degree. More importantly I became aware of my own lack of knowledge and experience with yoga. Being every day in a room packed with accomplished *asana* practitioners did something with my confidence. I came to see that my practice was far from advanced – I had not even finished the primary series when I arrived in Mysore the first time – and though I had gotten a few second series postures by the end of my stay, I felt inadequate compared to the many more advanced students who still did not teach, and were waiting for their authorisations. Though quite a few start teaching before being authorised – there would not be many teachers in Norway if they had not – I became caught in the Mysore way of thinking. Not being authorised, and not even having done a teacher training, my confidence in my own ability was waning. Maybe if I had not moved to Oslo a few months after returning to Norway from my fieldwork, I might have gone back to teaching, as there are more – in sheer numbers – advanced students/teachers in Oslo than in Trondheim, but I’m not sure. In addition to feeling less confidence, I had become more absorbed in my own practice. In Mysore I had glimpsed more of what lay beyond my own meagre *asana* practiced, and I wanted to improve on what I was doing. When I returned from the fieldwork I started practicing at Zenit a few days-a-week, but then I further wrecked my knee, and thought that I better take it a bit easy not to aggravate it even more. With moving to Oslo, this made me practice very little the next year or so. I practiced sporadically up until going back to Mysore in February 2011, and then again until January 2012 when I purchased a membership at Puro in Oslo. I still do not practice daily, but I try to go there, maybe two days a week. Trying to get back up from my back-bends I now do only the primary series, having laid off the few second series postures Saraswathi gave me in 2009 and 2011. My confidence in my own practice has not recovered, and might not do so. At Puro there are many accomplished and dedicated practitioners, and comparing myself to them, I cannot imagine teaching at Puro or anywhere else in Oslo. What could I teach these people? Now, I am just trying to keep up my practice, to some degree, and I am enjoying that without punishing myself too much on the days that I am not able to drag my lazy butt out of bed in the morning, but I am still dreaming of being able to practice every day – of being disciplined – and of going to Mysore to sweat it out in the Shala among that crazy bunch of strange, but dedicated and (mostly) honest, hard working people.

## 12: Literature

Alter, Joseph S. (1997): "A therapy to live by: Public health, the self and nationalism in the practice of a North Indian yoga society." In: *Medial Anthropology*, Volume 17(:4), pp. 309-335.

Alter, Joseph S. (1999): "Heaps of Health, Metaphysical Fitness: Ayurveda and Ontology of Good Health in Medical Anthropology." In: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 40, No. 51, Special Issue Culture – A Second Chance? (February 1999), pp. S43-S66.

Alter, Joseph S. (2004): "Yoga in Modern India – The Body between Science and Philosophy." Princeton University Press; Princeton and Oxford.

Alter, Joseph S. (2005): "Modern Medical Yoga: Struggling with a History of Magic, Alchemy and Sex." In: *Asian Medicine*, Volume 1, 2005, pp. 119-146 (28).

Alter, Joseph S. (2008): "Yoga *Shivir*: Performativity and the Study of Modern Yoga." In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Ancis, Julie R. (2006): "Western Beauty Practices: Searching for the Cause and Effect." In: *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2006 30: 330.

Appadurai, Arjun (ed.) (1986): "The Social Life of Things – Commodities in cultural perspective." Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

Appadurai, Arjun (1996): "Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization." University of Minnesota Press; Minneapolis & London.

Appadurai, Arjun (2001): "Grassroots Globalisation and the Research Imagination." In: Appadurai, Arjun (red.) (2001): *Globalisation*. Duke University Press.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

AYNY [Ashtanga Yoga New York] (2012): "How the NYT Can Wreck Yoga." Posted January 8, 2012 at <http://ayny.org>: <http://ayny.org/how-the-nyt-can-wreck-yoga.html> Accessed: January 17, 2012. (Written by the director of AYNY Eddie Stern. See also: Stern, Eddie (2012).)

Bal, Mieke (2002): "Travelling Concepts in the Humanities – A Rough Guide." University of Toronto Press; Toronto, Buffalo and London.

Banks, Marcus (1996): "Ethnicity: Anthropological constructions." London: Routledge.

Barth, Frederik (1967): "Economic Spheres in Darfur." In: Firth, Raymond (ed.) (1967): *Themes in Economic Anthropology*. A.S.A Monographs 6: Travistock Publications; London, New York, Sydney, Toronto, Wellington. (Also Barth 1996b for Norwegian version.)

Barth, Frederik (1969): "Introduction." In: Barth, Frederik (ed.) (1969): *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries – The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. Universitetsforlaget; Bergen and Oslo./George Allen & Unwin; London.

Barth, Fredrik (1975): "Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman of New Guinea." Universitetsforlaget; Oslo. Yale University Press; New Haven.

Barth, Fredrik (1990): "The Guru and the Conjurer: Transactions in Knowledge and the Shaping of Culture in South East Asia and Melanesia." In: *Man*, vol. 25, number 4, December 1990, 640-53.

Barth, Fredrik (1996): "Manifestasjon og Prosess." Universitetsforlaget; Oslo.

Barth, Fredrik (1996b): "Økonomiske sfærer i Darfur." In Barth: *Manifestasjon og Prosess*. Universitetsforlaget; Oslo.

Barth, Fredrik (1996c): "Rolledilemmaer og far-sønn-dominans i slektsappssystemer i Midt-Østen" In: Barth, Fredrik (ed.) (1996): Manifestasjon og prosess. Universitetsforlaget.

Bateson, Gregory (1979): "Mind and Nature – A Necessary Unity." Bantam Books; Toronto, New York & London.

Bateson, Gregory (2000) [1972]: "Steps to an Ecology of Mind." University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Bateson, Gregory (2000a) [1972]: "A Theory of Play and Fantasy." In: Bateson, Gregory (2000) [1972]: Steps to an Ecology of Mind. University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Bateson, Gregory (2000c) [1972]: "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication." In: Bateson, Gregory (2000) [1972]: Steps to an Ecology of Mind. University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Bateson, Gregory (2000d) [1972]: "Form, Substance, and Difference." In: Bateson, Gregory (2000) [1972]: Steps to an Ecology of Mind. University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Bateson, Gregory (2000e) [1972]: "Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art." In: Bateson, Gregory (2000) [1972]: Steps to an Ecology of Mind. University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Bateson, Gregory (2002) [1979]: "Mind and Nature – A Necessary Unity." Hampton press, inc; Cresskill, New Jersey.

Bateson, Gregory and Bateson, Mary Catherine (2005): "Angels Fear – Towards and Epistemology of the Sacred." Hampton Press, Inc.; Cresskill, New Jersey.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Baudrillard, Jean (2005): "The Finest Consumer Object: The Body." In: Fraser, Mariam & Greco, Monica (eds.) (2005): *The Body – A Reader*. Routledge; London & New York.

Bauman, Zygmunt (1992): "Survival as a Social Construct." In: *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 9 (1992), pp. 1-36.

Benedict, Ruth (1989) [1946]: "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword – Patterns of Japanese Culture." Houghton Mifflin Company; Boston.

Bernard, Russel H. (2006): "Research Methods in Anthropology – Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches." AltaMira Press; Lanham, New York, Toronto and Oxford.

Bloch, Charlotte (1987): "Everyday Life, Sensuality, and Body Culture." In: *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 10, No. 4, (1987) pp. 433-442.

Bloch, Maurice and Parry, Jonathan (1989): "Money and the Morality of Exchange", In: Bloch, Maurice and Parry, Jonathan (eds.) (1989): *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, s. 1-33, Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

Bloch, Jon P. (1998): "Individualism and Community in Alternative Spiritual "Magic."" In: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (June., 1998), pp 286-302.

Bohannon, Paul (1959): "The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy", In: *Journal of Economic History*, vol.19, 1959, s. 491-501.

Bohm, David (1987) [1985]: "Unfolding Meaning; A Weekend of Dialogue with David Bohm." Ark Paperbacks; London & New York.

Bohm, David (1995): "Soma-significance: A New Notion Between the Physical and the Mental." 18.07.02: <http://www.goertzel.org/dynapsyc/1995/bohm.html>



Bohm, David (2002) [1980]: "Wholeness and the Implicate Order." Routledge; London & New York.

Bohm, David (2004) [1996]: "On Creativity." Routledge; London & New York.

Bohm, David & Peat, F. David (2011) [1987]: "Science, Order, and Creativity." Routledge; London & New York.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1978): "Sport and social class." In: *Social Science Information* 17, 6 (1978), pp. 819-840.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1986) [1979]: "Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste." Routledge; London

Bourdieu, Pierre (1995) [1979]: "Distinksjonene – En sosiologisk kritikk av dømmekraften." Pax Forlag A/S; Oslo.

Bourdieu, Pierre (2007) [1977]: "Outline of a Theory of Practice." Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

Bowie, Fiona (2006) [2000]: "The Anthropology of Religion – An Introduction. Second Edition." Blackwell Publishing; Malden, Oxford & Carlton.

Brewis, Joanna and Sinclair, John (2000): "Exploring embodiment: women, biology and work." I: Hassard, John, Holliday, Ruth & Hugh Wilmott (red.) (2000): *Body and Organization*. Sage Publications; London.

Broad, William J. (2012a): "How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body." In *New York Times*, published January 5, 2012: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/08/magazine/how-yoga-can-wreck-your-body.html?\\_r=3&pagewanted=all&fb\\_source=message](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/08/magazine/how-yoga-can-wreck-your-body.html?_r=3&pagewanted=all&fb_source=message) Accessed: January 17, 2012.

Broad, William J. (2012b): "The Science of Yoga: The Risks and the Rewards." Simon & Schuster; New York, London, Toronto, Sydney & New Delhi.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Brodey, Warren (1971): “Biotopology 1972.” In: *Radical Software*, Volume 1, nr. 4, 1971, pp. 4-7. Available online: [www.radicalsoftware.org/volume1nr4/pdf/VOLUME1NR4\\_art02.pdf](http://www.radicalsoftware.org/volume1nr4/pdf/VOLUME1NR4_art02.pdf) Accessed: October 3, 2012.

Brooks, David (2002): “Bobos in Paradise – The New Upper Class and How They Got There.” Simon & Schuster; New York, London, Toronto, Sydney & Singapore.

Brostrom, Cara (2012): “So You Want to Practice Ashtanga Yoga in Mysore.” In: *Elephant Journal*, posted March 25, 2012: <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/03/so-you-want-to-practice-ashtanga-yoga-in-mysore--cara-brostrom/> Accessed: March 27, 2012.

Brunk, Conrad G. and Young, James O. (2009): “‘The Skin off our Backs’ – Appropriation of Religion.” In: Young, James O. and Brunk, Conrad G. (eds.) (2009): *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*. Wiley-Blackwell; Chichester.

Buddhananda, Swami (1978): “Moola Bandha, The Master Key.” Yoga Publications; Munger, Bihar, India.

Budig, Kathryn (2012): “Stop Judging and Read.” In: *Huffpost Healthy Living*, posted January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathryn-budig/yoga-briohny-kate-smyth\\_b\\_1202653.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathryn-budig/yoga-briohny-kate-smyth_b_1202653.html) Accessed: April 10, 2012.

Burton, John W. (2001): “Culture and the Human Body – An Anthropological Perspective.” Waveland Press, Inc.; Illinois.

Cahn, Steve (2012): “Breaking News: Ashtanga to Become Science!” In: *Elephant Journal*, posted, April 11, 2012: <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/04/breaking-news-ashtanga-to-become-science--steven-cahn/> Accessed: April 12, 2012. (Also TCC 11)

Cartmill, Matt (1993): "A View to a Death in the Morning – Hunting and Nature through History." Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England.

Castaneda, Carlos (1998) [1968]: "The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge." Washington Square Press; New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo and Singapore.

Cerwonka, Allaine (2007): "Nervous Conditions – The Stakes in Interdisciplinary Research." In: Cerwonka, Allaine and Malkki, Liisa H. (2007): *Improvising Theory – Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Clifford, James and Marcus, George (eds.) (1986): "Writing Culture – The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography" University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.

Cochran, Heidi Lynne (2009): "Shaping a Form: The Evolution of the Feminine Ideal" In: *Intersections - a journal of interdisciplinary thought*, volume 7, 2009.

Coulter, H. David (2001): "Anatomy of Hatha Yoga – A Manual for Students, Teachers, and Practitioners." Body and Breath; Honesdale, PA, USA.

Counihan, Carole M. (1999): "Food Rules in the United States – Individualism, Control, and Hierarchy." In: Counihan, Carol M. (1999): *The Anthropology of Food and Body – Gender, Meaning, and Power*. Routledge; New York and London.

Cox, Rupert (2011): "Thinking through Movement: Practicing Martial Arts and Writing Ethnography." In: Ingold, Tim (ed.) (2011): *Redrawing Anthropology – Materials, Movement, Lines*. Ashgate; Farnham, England & Burlington, USA.

Crozier, Ivan (ed.) (2010): "A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Modern Age." Berg; Oxford & New York.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1991) [1990]: "Flow – The Psychology of Optimal Experience." Harper Perennial; New York.

Csordas, Thomas J. (1994): "Introduction: the body as representation and being-in-the-world." In: Csordas, Thomas J. (ed.) (1994): *Embodiment and Experience*. Cambridge Press.

Csordas, Thomas J. (2001): "Language, charisma, & creativity – Ritual life in the catholic charismatic renewal." Palgrave.

Csordas, Thomas J. (2002): "Body/Healing/Meaning." Palgrave; Basingstoke & New York.

Csordas, Thomas J. (2002a): "The Rhetoric of Transformation in Ritual Healing." In: Csordas, Thomas J. (2002): *Body/Healing/Meaning*." Palgrave; Basingstoke & New York.

Csordas, Thomas J. (2002b): "Somatic Modes of Attention." In: Csordas, Thomas J. (2002): *Body/Healing/Meaning*." Palgrave; Basingstoke & New York.

Csordas, Thomas J. (2004): "Asymptote of the Ineffable: Embodiment, Alterity, and the Theory of Religion." In: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 45, No.2 (April 2004), pp. 163-185.

Csordas, Thomas J. (ed.) (2009): "Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization." University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.

Csordas, Thomas J. (2009b): Introduction – Modalities of Transnational Transcendence." In: Csordas, Thomas J. (ed.) (2009): *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*. University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.

D'Andrade, Roy G. (1992): "Schemas and motivation." In: D'Andrade, Roy G. & Strauss, Claudia (eds.) (1992): *Human motives and cultural models*. Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne & Sydney.

D'Andrade, Roy G. (1995): "The Development of Cognitive Anthropology." Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, New York & Melbourne.

Das, Veena (1994): "The Anthropological Discourse on India: Reason and its Other." In: Borofsky, Robert (red.) (1994): *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*. McGraw-Hill.

De Michelis, Elizabeth (2005) [2004]: "A History of Modern Yoga." Continuum; London & New York.

De Michelis, Elizabeth (2007): "A Preliminary Survey of Modern Yoga Studies." In: *Asian Medicine*, volume 3 (2007), 11-19.

De Michelis (2008): "Modern Yoga: History and Forms." In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Desikachar, T. K. V. (1995): *The Heart of Yoga – Developing a Personal Practice.* Inner Traditions; Bombay.

Desjarlais, Robert R. (1992): "Body and Emotion – The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas." PENN, University of Pennsylvania Press; Philadelphia.

Desjarlais, Robert (1996): "Struggling along." In: Jackson, Michael (ed.) (1996): *Things as they are. New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*. Indiana University Press.

Dewey, John (1958) [1929]: "Experience and Nature." Dover Publications, INC; New York.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Dewey, John (2005) [1934]: "Art as Experience." A Pergree Book; New York.

Donahaye, Guy & Stern, Eddie (2010): "Guruji – A Portrait of Sri K. Pattabhi Jois Through the Eyes of His Students." North Point Press, A division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux; New York.

Douglas, Mary (2002) [1966]: "Purity and Danger – An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo." Routledge; London and New York.

Drooges, André (2006): "The Third Bank of the River – Play, methodological ludism, and the definition of religion." In: van Haarskamp, Anton, Miranda Klaver, Johan Roeland & Peter Versteeg (eds.) (2006): *Playful Religion – Challenges for the Study of Religion*. Eburon Delft; Delft.

Dubois, Daniel M. (2010): "Natural and Artificial Intelligence, Language, Consciousness, Emotion, and Anticipation". In: Dubois D.M. (ed.) (2010): *COMPUTING ANTICIPATORY SYSTEMS: CASYS'09 - Ninth International Conference*, American Institute of Physics, AIP CP 1303, pp. 236-245, 2010.

Duerr, Hans Peter (1987) [1985]: "Sedna eller kärleken till livet." Symposium; Stockholm.

Duerr, Hans Peter (1991) [1978]: "Dreamtime – Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization." Basil Blackwell Ltd; Oxford.

Durkheim, Emil (1979) [1915]: "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life." In: Lessa, William A. & Evon Z. Vogt (eds.) (1979): *Reader in comparative religion – An anthropological approach, fourth edition*. HarperCollinsPublishers.

Dwyer, Tom (1991): "Humor, Power, and Change in Organizations." In: *Human Relations*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1991.

Edgar, Iain R. (2011): "The Dream in Islam: From Qur'anic Tradition to Jihadist Inspiration." Berghahn Books.

Edge, Lucy (2006) [2005]: "Yoga School Dropout." Ebury Press

Eliade, Mircea (2009) [1958]: "Yoga – Immortality and freedom." Bollingen Series LVI, Princeton University Press; Princeton & Oxford.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1976): "Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande." Oxford University Press; Oxford.

Evens, T.M.S. and Handelman, Don (eds.) (2006): "The Manchester School – Practice and Ethnographic Praxis in Anthropology." Berghahn Books; New York and Oxford.

Fairley, Josephine (2012): "Yoga: it's never too late to reap the benefits." In: *The Guardian*, posted May 1th, 2012  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/may/01/yoga-benefits-never-too-late>  
Accessed: May 8th 2012

Featherstone, Mike (1991): "Consumer Culture, Postmodernism, and Global Disorder." In: Robertson, Roland and William R. Garrett (eds.) (1991): *Religion and Global Order – Religion and the Political Order – volume 5*. Paragon House Publishers; New York.

Featherstone, Mike (1995): "The Body in Consumer Culture." In: Mike Featherstone et. al. (1995): *The Body – Social Process and Cultural Theory*. Sage Publications; London.

Feuerstein, Georg (2001) [1998]: "The Yoga Tradition – Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice." Hohm Press; Prescott, Arizona.

Flood, Gavin (1996): "An introduction to Hinduism." Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Follo, Gro (2008): "Diskuter deltakende observasjon rolle i antropologisk teoribygging." Unpublished manuscript trial lecture, 13.06.2008.

Foucault, Michel (2003) [1963]: "The Birth of the Clinic – An archaeology of medical perception." Routledge Classics; London and New York.

Freedman, Jim (1977): "Joking, Affinity and the Exchange of Ritual services Among the Kiga of Northern Rwanda; An Essay on Joking Relationship Theory." In: *Man*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Apr., 1977), pp. 154-165.

Friedman, Jonathan (1990): "Being in the World: Globalization and Localization." In: Featherstone, Mike (red.) (1990): *Global Culture – Nationalism, Globalisation and Modernity*. Sage Publications; London.

Friedman, Jonathan (1993): "Order and Disorder in Global Systems." In: *Social Research*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (1993).

Friedman, Jonathan (1994): "Cultural Identity & Global Process." Sage Publications; London, Thousand Oaks and New Dehli.

Fraser, Mariam & Greco, Monica (eds.) (2005): "The Body – A Reader." Routledge; London & New York.

Fromberg, Eden G. (2012): "Yogi Glenn Black Responds to *New York Times* Article on Yoga." In: *Huffpost Healthy Living*, posted January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eden-g-fromberg-do/yoga\\_b\\_1202465.html?ref=mostpopular](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eden-g-fromberg-do/yoga_b_1202465.html?ref=mostpopular) Accessed: February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Frøystad, Kathinka (2009): "The Return Path – Anthropology of the Western Yogi." In: Csordas, Thomas J. (ed.) (2009): *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*. University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.



Fyhn, Håkon (2001): "Shaman in the world of experience – A journey exploring consciousness." Unpublished: Thesis submitted for the degree of dr. philos. Norwegian University of Science and Technology Trondheim.

Fyhn, Håkon (2005): "Metodisk tvil. Metodisk tro." In: Stein Johansen (ed) (2005) *Anthropology and Ontology – Trondheim Occasional Papers in Social Anthropology*. Department of Social anthropology, NTNU, Trondheim.

Fyhn, Håkon (2011): "Møte med tilstedeværelse – Mellom form og tomhet i produktutvikling, aikido og antropologisk erkjennelse." Dr.philol.-thesis, Department of Social Anthropology, NTNU. Tapir Trykk; Trondheim.

Færøvik, Torbjørn (1999): "India – Stevnemøte med skjebnen." Cappelen.

Geertz, Clifford (1988): "Works and Lives – The Anthropologist as Author." Stanford University Press; Stanford, California.

Geertz, Clifford (1993) [1973]: "The Interpretation of Cultures." Fontana Press, HarperCollinsPublishers; New York.

Geertz, Clifford (1993a) [1973]: "Deep play – Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." In: *The Interpretation of Cultures – Selected Essays*. Fontana Press; London.

Geertz, Clifford (1993b) [1973]: "Person, Time, and Conduct in Bali." In: Geertz, Clifford (1993) [1973]: *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Fontana Press, HarperCollinsPublishers; New York.

Giddens, Anthony (1990): "The Consequences of Modernity." Polity Press; Cambridge.

Giddens, Anthony (1993): "Modernity, History, Democracy." In: *Theory and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Apr., 1993), pp. 289-292.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Gilbert, Elizabeth (2007) [2006]: "Eat, pray, love – one woman's search for everything." Bloomsbury; London.

Glaeser, Andreas (2006): "An Ontology for the Ethnographic Analysis of Social Process." In: Evens, T. M. S. and Handelman, Don (eds.) (2006): *The Manchester School – Practice and ethnographic praxis in anthropology*. Berghahn Books; New York and Oxford.

Glassner, Barry (1989): "Fitness and the Postmodern Self." In: *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Jun., 1989), pp. 180-191.

Gluckman, Max (1960) [1956]: "Custom and Conflict in Africa." Basil Blackwell; Oxford.

Godkin, Kate (2012): "Why is yoga so afraid of change?" Posted on mindbodygreen.com, March 23, 2012, at: <http://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-4322/Why-Is-Yoga-So-Afraid-of-Change.html> (Accessed: April 10, 2012.)

Goffman, Erving (1990) [1959]: "The presentation of self in everyday life." Penguin Books.

Good, Byron J. (1994): "Medicine, rationality, and experience: An anthropological perspective." Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

Good, Byron and Good, Mary-Jo DelVecchio (2005): "On the "Subject" of Culture: Subjectivity and Cultural Phenomenology in the Work of Clifford Geertz." In: Shweder, Richard A. and Good, Byron (eds.) (2005): *Geertz by His Colleagues*. University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Grønhaug, Reidar (1974): "Micro-Macro Relations: Social Organization in Antalya, Southern Turkey. Part 2: Tahtacilar. Macro-Factors in the Life of a Marginal Sub-Population." Department of Social Anthropology University of Bergen; Bergen.

Gundelach, Peter (2000): "Joking Relationships and National Identity in Scandinavia." In: *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2000), pp. 113-122.

Gupta, Akhil and Ferguson, James (2002): "Beyond 'culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." In: Inda, Xavier Jonathon and Rosaldo, Renato (red.) (2002): *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*. Blackwell Publishing; Malden, Oxford & Victoria-

Haig, David (2003): "The Science That Dare Not Speak Its Name." (Review of: *Narrow Roads Of Gene Land: The Collected Papers Of W. D. Hamilton. Volume 2: The Evolution Of Sex. By W. D. Hamilton (2001).*) In: *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, Vol. 78, No. 3 (September 2003), pp. 327-335.

Hambro, Sarah (2012): "Yogamysteriene." In: *D2*, Friday supplement to *Dagens Næringsliv*, March 30, 2012. Also: "Yoga kan gjøre deg tykk og forårsake hjerneslag." Published online at: <http://www.dn.no/d2/article2364690.ece>

Hannerz, Ulf (2004): "Foreign News – Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents." The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Haraway, Donna (1993): "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies – Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse." In: Lindenbaum, Shirley and Lock, Margaret (eds.) (1993): *Knowledge, Power, and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life*. University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.

Harvey, Penelope (2007): "Arresting Mobility or Locating Expertise: 'Globalisation' and the 'Knowledge Society'." In: Lien, Marianne Elisabeth and Melhuus, Marit (eds.) (2007): *Holding Worlds Together – Ethnographies of Knowing and Belonging*. Berghahn Books; New York and Oxford.

Hasselle-Newcombe, Suzanne (2005): "Spirituality and 'Mystical Religion' in Contemporary Society: A Case Study of British Practitioners of the Iyengar Method of Yoga." In: *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, volume 20, No. 3, 2005 pp. 305-321.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Hastrup, Kirsten (2005) [1995]: "A Passage to Anthropology – between experience and theory." Routledge; London and New York.

Hayden, Michael Edison (2012): "Power of Celibacy" [Interview with Joseph S. Alter]. In: *Open Magazine*, 25 February 2012. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/books/power-of-celibacy> Accessed: 29 February 2012.

Hebdige, Dick (1999) [1979]: "Subcultures – the meaning of style." Routledge; London and New York.

Hedges, Ellie and Beckford, James A. (2000): "Holism, Healing and the New Age." In: Sutcliffe, Steven and Bowman, Marion (eds.) (2000): *Beyond New Age – Exploring Alternative Spirituality*. Edinburgh University Press; Edinburgh.

Heelas, Paul (1996): "The New Age Movement – The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity." Blackwell Publishing; Malden, USA, Oxford, UK and Carlton, Australia.

Heelas, Paul and Woodhead, Linda et al. (2005): "The Spiritual Revolution – why religion is giving way to spirituality." Blackwell Publishing; Malden, USA, Oxford, UK and Carlton, Australia.

Heelas, Paul (2008): "Spiritualities of Life – New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism." Blackwell Publishing; Malden & Oxford.

Hoff-Leirvik, Erling (2000): "Samhandlingens ethos – et blick på ledelse og kommunikasjon i Rosenborg Ballklub." In: KUNNE Nedtegnelse N05/00, SINTEF Teknologiledelse 2000. Available at: <http://www.kunne.no/templates/Page.aspx?id=548> Accessed: October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Holdrege, Barbara (1998): "Body connections: Hindu discourses of the body and the study of religion." In: *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 2,3 (December 1998): 341-86.

Ingold, Tim (2000): "The Perception of the Environment – Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill." Routledge; London & New York.

Israel, Ira (2012): "What is Yoga?" In: *Huffpost Healthy Living*, posted January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ira-israel/what-is-yoga\\_b\\_1217342.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ira-israel/what-is-yoga_b_1217342.html)  
Accessed: February 24th, 2012.

Iyengar, B.K.S. (1994) [1966]: "Light on Yoga." Shoken Books; New York.

Jackson, Michael (1983): "Knowledge of the Body." In: *Man*, New Series, Vol. 18, No. 2, (Jun 1983). Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Jackson, Michael (1989): "Paths toward a clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry" Indiana University Press; Bloomington and Indianapolis.

Jacobsen, Knut A. (ed.) (2012): "Yoga Powers – Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration." (Brill's Indological Library (ed. Johannes Bronkhors), Vol. 37.) Brill; Leiden & Boston.

Jeffreys, Sheila (2000): "'Body Art' and Social Status: Cutting, Tattooing and Piercing from a Feminist Perspective." In: *Feminism & Psychology*, 2000 10: 409.

Johansen, Stein E. (1991): "Begrepet om arbeidstidsinnholdet: en teoretisk konstruksjon – Et revisjonistisk bidrag til funderingen av en formreflektert kapitalteori." Ariadne Forlag; Bergen.

Johansen, Stein E. (2004): "Hyperdimensjonal ontologi og bevissthet: Frontvitenskapelige tankedrypp av relevans for psykologisk vitenskap." In:

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

*Psykologisk Tidsskrift - Selvet, identitet og personlighet*, 2004, Nr. 1. (Manuscript received from the author.)

Johansen, Stein E. (2007) [1988]: "24 timers mennesker: om livet hinsides arbeidet blant motkulturell ungdom i Trondheim." Tapir akademisk forlag, Kompendieforlaget; Trondheim.

Johansen, Stein E. (2008): "Grunnriss av en differensiell epistemologi." Abstrakt forlag; Oslo.

Jois, Sri K. Pattabhi (2002) [1999]: "Yoga Mala." North Point Press; New York.

Jois, Sri K. Pattabhi (2005): "Sūryanamaskāra." Ashtanga Yoga New York; New York.

Jørgensen, Svein-Halvard (2004): "På sporet av improvisasjonens potensiale." Dr.art.-thesis, Department of Music, NTNU. Tapir Trykk; Trondheim.

Jørgensen, Svein-Halvard (2009): "Kompleks bevegelse og fotballfaglige utfordringer." In: Fyhn, Håkon (ed.) (2009): *Kreativ tverrfaglighet – teori og praksis*. Tapir akademisk forlag; Trondheim.

Kaivalya, Alanna (2012): "Can Yoga Wreck Your Body? Absolutely! It can Also Save Your Life." In: *Huffpost Healty Living*, posted January 19, 2012, at <http://huffingtonpost.com>: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alanna-kaivalya/yoga-new-york-times\\_b\\_1202447.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alanna-kaivalya/yoga-new-york-times_b_1202447.html) Accessed: January 20, 2012.

Kapferer, Bruce (1984): "The Ritual Process and the Problem of Reflexivity in Sinhalese Demon Exorcisms." In: MacAloon, John J. (ed.) (1984): *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle – Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*. Institute for the Study of Human Issues; Philadelphia.

Kapferer, Bruce (2006): "Coda: Recollections and Refutations." In: Evens, T. M. S. and Handelman, Don (eds.) (2006): *The Manchester School – Practice and ethnographic praxis in anthropology*. Berghahn Books; New York and Oxford.

Kapferer, Bruce (2007): "Afterword – New Wine in Old Bottles: The Anthropological Project Revitalized." In: Lien, Marianne Elisabeth and Melhuus, Marit (eds.) (2007): *Holding Worlds Together – Ethnographies of Knowing and Belonging*. Berghahn Books; New York and Oxford.

Keesing, R. M. (1989): "Creating the Past: Custom and Identity in the Contemporary Pacific" In: *The Contemporary Pacific*. Vol. 1, no. 1 & 2, pp. 19-42.

Keil, David (2012): "Response to NYT Article – How Yoga Can Wreck Your Body." Posted January 12, 2012, at <http://www.yoganatomy.com/2012/01/respons-to-nyt-article-how-yoga-can-wreck-your-body/#.TxEDOsO9WXM.facebook> Accessed: January 18, 2012.

Kliever, Lonnie D. (1991): "Radical Democratization and Radical Monotheism: Mannheim and Niebuhr on Global Order." In: Robertson, Roland and William R. Garrett (eds.) (1991): *Religion and Global Order – Religion and the Political Order – volume 5*. Paragon House Publishers; New York.

Kopytoff, Igor (1986): "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process", In: Arjun Appadurai (ed.) (1986): *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge.

Kovach, Judith (2002): "The Body as the Ground of Religion, Science, and Self." In: *Zygon*, vol. 37, no. 4 (December 2002).

Kraft, Siv Ellen (2005): "Den ville kroppen – tatoveringer, piercing og smerteritualler i dag." Pax Forlag A/S; Oslo.

Kraidy, Marwan M. (1999): "The Global, the Local, and the Hybrid: A Native Ethnography of Globalization." I: *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16, 1999.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Krogstad, Anne (1989): "Punk symbols on a concrete Background: From External Provocation to Internal Moralism." In: *Social Analysis*, No. 26, December 1989.

Kuhn, Thomas S. (1996) [1962]: "The structure of scientific revolutions." The Chicago University Press; Chicago and London.

Lakoff, Andrew (2008): "Diagnostic Liquidity: Mental Illness and the Global Trade in DNA." In: India, Xavier Jonathon and Rosaldo, Renato (red.) (2008): *The Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader. Second Edition*. Blackwell Publishing; Malden, Oxford & Victoria.

Lambek, Michael (ed.) (2008): "A reader in the Anthropology of Religion – second edition." Blackwell Publishing; Malden and Oxford.

Langford, Jean (1995): "Ayurvedic Interior: Person, space, and Episteme in Three Medical Practices." In: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Aug., 1995), p 330-366.

Langøien, Lars Jørn (2006): "Girls on the bridge – a study of performance and unfolding of meaning through double description in Japanese cosplay." Master's thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the Cand. Polit. Degree, Department of Social Anthropology, NTNU; Trondheim.

Larsen, Tord (1979): "Er alle stygge andunger egentlig svaner? Tanker om antropologenes moralske sakkyndighet." In: *Antropologinytt*. 1979.

Latour, Bruno (1987): "Science in Action." Harvard University Press.

Lave, Jean (1991): "Situating learning in communities of practice." In: Resnick, Lauren B.; Levine, John M. & Teasley, Stephanie D. (eds.) (1991): *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition*. American Psychological Association; Washington DC.



Law, John (2004): "After Method – mess in social science research." Routledge; London and New York.

Lawson, Jill (2012): "Yoga Purists Shames Modern Yoga Teacher: A Response to Ira Israel." Published February 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, on "Diets in Review.com": [http://www.dietsinreview.com/diet\\_column/02/yoga-purist-shames-modern-yoga-teacher-a-response-to-ira-israel/](http://www.dietsinreview.com/diet_column/02/yoga-purist-shames-modern-yoga-teacher-a-response-to-ira-israel/) Accessed: February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Leach, Edmund (1979): "Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Aategories and Verbal Abuse." In: Lessa, William A. & Evon Z. Vogt (eds.) (1979): *Reader in comparative religion – An anthropological approach, fourth edition*. HaperCollinsPublishers.

Leder, Drew (1990): "The Absent Body." University of Chicago Press; Chicago.

Leslie, Charles and Young, Allen (eds.) (1992a): "Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge." University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford.

Leslie, Charles and Young, Allen (1992b): "Introduction." In: Leslie, Charles and Young, Allen (eds.) (1992): *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge*. University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford.

Lessa, William A. & Evon Z. Vogt (eds.) (1979): "Reader in Comparative Religion – An anthropological approach. Fourth Edition." Harper Collins *Publishers*; New York.

Lévi-Stauss, Claude (1966): "The science of the concrete." In: C. Lévi-Strauss: *The savage mind*, (s 1-33). Weidenfeld and Nicolson; London.

Levine, H. B, (1999): "Reconstructing Ethnicity", In: *Journal of Royal Anthropological Inst.* (N.S.) 5:165-180.

Libet, Benjamin (1992): "The Neural Time – Factor in Perception, Volition and Free Will." In: *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 97e Année, No. 2, Neurosciences et philosophie Le problème de la conscience (Avril-Juin 1992), pp. 255-272.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Lien, Marianne Elisabeth and Melhuus, Marit (eds.) (2007): "Holding Worlds Together – Ethnographies of Knowing and Belonging." Berghahn Books; New York and Oxford.

Liberman, Kenneth (2008): "The Reflexivity of the Authenticity of *Haṭha* Yoga." In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Lindenbaum, Shirley and Lock, Margaret (eds.) (1993): "Knowledge, Power, and Practice: The Anthropology of Medicine and Everyday Life." University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.

Lindholm, Charles (2008): "Culture and Authenticity." Blackwell Publishing; Malden, Oxford, and Carlton.

Lock, Margaret (1993): "Cultivating the Body: Anthropology and Epistemology of Bodily Practice and Knowledge." In: *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 1993, 22: 133-155.

Lock, Margaret (2002): "Twice Dead – Organ Transplants and the reinvention of Death." University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.

Lock, Margaret and Farquhar, Judith (eds.) (2007): "Beyond the Body Proper – Reading the Anthropology of Material Life." Duke University Press; Durham and London.

Love, Robert (2010): "The Great Oom – The Improbable Birth of Yoga in America." Viking; London.

Macdonald, Sarah (2002): "Holy Cow – An Indian Adventure." Broadway Books; New York.

Malinowski, Bronislaw (1922): "Argonauts of the Western Pacific." Routledge; London.

Marchand, Trevor H. J. (2008): "Muscles, Morals and Mind: Craft Apprenticeship and the Formation of Person." In: *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol, 56, No. 3, September 2008, pp. 245-271.

Marcus, George E. (1995): "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography." I: *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol. 24. (1995), pp 95-117.

Marcus, George E. and Fischer, Michael M. J. (1999) [1986]: "Anthropology as Cultural Critique – An experimental moment in the human sciences" The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Martin, Emily (1987): "The Woman in the Body – A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction." Beacon Press; Boston.

Mauss, Marcel (1954): "The Gift – Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies." Cohen & West LTD; London.

Mauss, Marcel (1973): "Techniques of the Body." I: *Economy and Society*. Vol 2, 1973.

Marx, Karl (1968): "Das Kapital – Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Erster Band." Europäische Verlagsanstalt; Frankfurt am Main.

Marx, Karl (2001): "Capital." Volume I-III, Elecbook (The Electric Book Company); London.

McGuire, Meredith B. (1993): "Health and Spirituality as Contemporary Concerns." In: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 527, Religion in the Nineties (May, 1993), pp. 144-154.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

McLean, Bethany (2012): "Whose Yoga Is it, Anyway?" In: *Vanity Fair*, April 2012. Published at: <http://www.vanityfair.com/business/2012/04/krishna-pattabhi-trophy-wife-ashtanga-yoga> (Accessed: April 9, 2012).

Mead, Margaret (2001) [1928]: "Coming of age in Samoa." Perennial Classics.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (2002) [1945]: "Phenomenology of perception." Routledge; London & New York.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (2007): "From *The Phenomenology of Perception*." In: Lock, Margaret and Farquhar, Judith (eds.) (2007): *Beyond the Body Proper – Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*. Duke University Press; Durham and London.

Mehta, Gita (1994) [1979]: "Karma Cola – Marketing the Mystic East." Vintage International, Vintage Books; New York.

Miele, Lino (2007) [1996]: "Aṣṭāṅga Yoga." Lino Miele; Rome.

Mitchell, J. Clyde (2006): "Case and Situational Analysis." In: Evens, T. M. S. and Handelman, Don (eds.) (2006): *The Manchester School – Practice and ethnographic praxis in anthropology*. Berghahn Books; New York and Oxford.

Mitra, Royona (2006): "Living a Body Myth, Performing a Body Reality: Reclaiming the Corporeality and Sexuality of the Indian Female Dancer." In: *Feminist Review*, No. 84, Postcolonial Theatres (2006), pp. 67-83.

Mol, Annemarie (2002): "The body multiple." Duke University Press; Durham.

Moore, Henrietta (1996): "Space, Text, and Gender – An Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya." The Guilford Press; New York & London.

Moore, Henrietta and Sanders, Todd (eds.) (2006): "Anthropology in Theory – Issues in Epistemology." Blackwell Publishing.

Moore, Robert J. (1995): "Dereification in Zen Buddhism." In: *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 699-723.

Morley, James (2001): "Inspiration and Expiration: Yoga Practice through Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body." In: *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), pp 73-82.

Morris, Brian (1994): "Anthropology of the Self – The Individual in Cultural Perspective." Pluto Press; London and Boulder, Colorado.

Morseth, Lea Loncar (1998): "Yoga – An Ancient Tool for Human Development. A qualitative field research in India on experiences of yoga among yoga practitioners." Master Thesis in psychology; NTNU, Trondheim.

Murphy, Robert F. (1987): "The Body Silent." Henry Hold and Company; New York.

Nanda, Meera (2011a): "Not as Old as You Think." In: *Open Magazine*, 12 February 2011. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/living/not-as-old-as-you-think> Accessed: 07 December 2011.

Nanda, Meera (2011b): "The Ludicrousness of 'Taking Back Yoga'." In: *Open Magazine*, 26 February 2011. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/international/the-ludicrousness-of-taking-back-yoga> Accessed: 07 December 2011.

Narby, Jeremy (1998): "The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge." Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin; New York.

Nevrin, Klas (2008): "Empowerment and Using the Body in Modern Postural Yoga." In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Newcombe, Suzanne (2007): "Stretching for Health and Well-Being: Yoga and Women in Britain, 1960-1980." In: *Asian Medicine*, volume 3 (2007), 37-63.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Obeyesekere, Gananath (1981): "Medusa's Hair – An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience." The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Olsen, Maren Næss (2012a): "Skjult mønster." In: *Morgenbladet*, March 28<sup>th</sup>, published online: March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (21:22), [http://morgenbladet.no/samfunn/2012/skjult\\_monster](http://morgenbladet.no/samfunn/2012/skjult_monster) Accessed: 19 August 2012.

Olsen, Maren Næss (2012b): "Terroistenes drømmekraft." In: *Morgenbladet*, September 21<sup>th</sup>, published online: September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (15:56), [http://morgenbladet.no/samfunn/2012/terroristenes\\_drommekraft#.UH02hxjRweM](http://morgenbladet.no/samfunn/2012/terroristenes_drommekraft#.UH02hxjRweM) Accessed: 16 October 2012.

Ortner, Sherry B. (1979): "On Key Symbols." In: Lessa, William A. & Evon Z. Vogt (eds.) (1979): *Reader in comparative religion – An anthropological approach, fourth edition*. HarperCollinsPublishers.

O'Shea, Janet (1998): "'Traditional' Indian Dance and the Making of Interpretive Communities." In: *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 45-63

O'Yeah, Zac (2005): "Guru! En resa i underlandet." Ordfront; Stockholm.

Patanjali (2007): "Sacred Texts: The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali – The Essential Yoga Texts for Spiritual Enlightenment" (Translation and Introduction by Swami Vivekananda), Watkins Publishing; London.

Pirruccello, Ann (2002): "Making the World My Body: Simone Weil and Somatic Practice." In: *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Oct., 2002), pp 479-497.

Pott, Dr. P. H. (1966) [1946]: "Yoga and Yantra – Their interrelation and their Significance for Indian Archeology." Martinius Nijhoff; The Hague.

Prince, Ruth and Riches, David (1999): “Back to the Future. The New Age Movement and Hunter-Gatherers.” In: *Anthropos*, Bd. 94, H. 1./3. (1999), pp- 107-120.

Rabeharisoa, Vololona (2004): ““Author Meets Critics – On Annemarie Mol’s *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*.” EASST-4S 2004, Paris, 25-28 August 2004. Downloaded from: <http://www.csi.ensmp.fr/WebCSI/4S/index.php?page=search>, 11.11.09

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1940): “On Joking Relationships.” In: *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Jul., 1940), pp. 195-210.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1952): “Structure and Function in Primitive Society – Essays and Addresses.” Cohen & West LTD.; London.

Räisänen, Petri (2005): “Kraften Bakom Yoga – Ashtangayogans åtta delar enligt Sri K. Pattabhi Jois.” Bokförlaget Prisma; Stockholm.

Rajagopal, Indhu and Gales, Jennifer (2002): “It’s the Image That Is Imperfect: Advertising and Its Impact on Women.” In: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 32 (Aug. 10-16, 2002), pp. 3333-3337.

Raknes, Ola (1927). “Møtet med det Heilage – Ein ettersøknad um det psykologiske grunnlaget for religion.” Gyldendal, Norsk forlag; Oslo.

Rapoport, Diego L. (2011): “Surmounting the Cartesian Cut Through Philosophy, Physics, Logic, Cybernetics, and Geometry: Self-Reference, Torsion, the Klein Bottle, the Time Operator, Multivalued Logics and Quantum Mechanics.” In: *Foundations of Physics*, Volume 41, Number 1 (2011), pp. 33-76. (Published online 22 August 2009.)

Reed, Nuria (2012): “Guerilla Ashtangi – Notes from the Field.” Posted April 22th 2012 on: <http://www.independent.com/news/2012/apr/22/guerilla-ashtangi/> Accessed: April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Riegler, Alexander (2007): “The Radical Constructivist Dynamics of Cognition.” In: Wallace, Brendan; Ross, Alastair; Davies, John & Anderson, Tony (ed.) 2007): *The Mind, the Body and the World: Psychology After Cognitivism?* Imprint: London, pp. 91-115. (Available in a slightly different version at: <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/riegler/44>)

Robbins, Joel (2009): “Is the *Trans-* in *Transnational* the *Trans-* in *Transcendent*? On Alterity and the Sacred in the Age of Globalisation.” In: Csordas, Thomas J. (ed.) (2009): *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*. University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.

Robertson, Roland and Garrett, William R. (eds.) (1991): “Religion and Global Order – Religion and the Political Order – volume 5.” Paragon House Publishers; New York

Roos, Gun and Rysst, Mari (eds.) (2001). “Skjønnhet og Helse – det ytre og indre.” SIFO, oppdragsrapport 11 (2011). Statens Institutt for Forbruksforskning; Oslo.

Rosen, Steven M. (1994): “Science, Paradox and the Moebius Principle – The Evolution of a “Transcultural” Approach to Wholeness.” State University of New York Press; Albany.

Rugseth, Gro and Engelsrud, Gunn (2011): ““Mitt liv som tjock” - om å gjøre tykkhet synlig” In: Roos, Gun and Rysst, Mari (eds.) (2001). *Skjønnhet og Helse – det ytre og indre*. SIFO, oppdragsrapport 11 (2011). Statens Institutt for Forbruksforskning; Oslo.

Sacks, Oliver (1990) [1987]: “A Leg to Stand on.” Harper Perennial Publishers; New York.

Sahlins, Marshall (1963): ”Poor Man, Rich Man, Big Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia.” In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, nr. 3, 1963.



Saillant, Francine and Genest, Serge (eds.) (2007a): “Medical Anthropology – Regional Perspectives and Shared Concerns.” Blackwell Publishing; Malden.

Saillant, Francine and Genest, Serge (2007b): “Introduction.” In: Saillant, Francine and Genest, Serge (eds.) (2007): *Medical Anthropology – Regional Perspectives and Shared Concerns*. Blackwell Publishing; Malden.

Samuel, Geoffrey (2007): “Endpiece.” In: *Asian Medicine*, volume 3 (2007), 177-188.

Sarbacker, Stuart Ray (2008): “The Numinous and Cessative in Modern Yoga.” In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Sarbacker, Stuart Ray (2012): “Power and Meaning in the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali.” In: Jacobsen, Knut A. (ed.) (2012): *Yoga Powers – Extraordinary Capacities Attained Through Meditation and Concentration*. (Brill’s Indological Library (ed. Johannes Bronkhors), Vol. 37.) Brill; Leiden & Boston.

Sarukkai, Sundar (2002) “Inside/Outside: Merleau-Ponty/Yoga.” In: *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Oct., 2002), pp 459-478.

Sassatelli, Roberta (1999): “Interaction Order and Beyond: A Field Analysis of Body Culture within Fitness Gyms.” In: *Body and Society*, 5, 2-3, pp. 227-248. (Available at: <http://www.sociol.unimi.it/docenti/sassatelli/Articoli%20pdf/Sassatelli%20-%20Interaction%20order%20and%20beyond%201999.pdf>)

Sassatelli, Roberta (2000): “The Commercialization of Discipline: Keep-Fit Culture and Its Values.” In: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2000, 5(3), pp. 396-411

Sassatelli, Roberta (2005): “The Commercialization of Discipline: Keep-fit Culture and its Values.” In: Fraser, Mariam & Greco, Monica (eds.) (2005): *The Body – A Reader*. Routledge; London & New York.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Sassatelli, Roberta (2006): "Fit Bodies. Fitness Culture and the Gym." In: F. Bonami et als. (eds.) (2006) *Human Game. Winners and Losers*, Charta; Milano, 252-261. (Available at: <http://www.sociol.unimi.it/docenti/sassatelli/Articoli%20pdf/Sassatelli%20-%20Fitbodies.%20Fitness%20culture%20and%20the%20gym.pdf>)

Sassatelli, Roberta (2010): "Fitness Culture – Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun." Palgrave Macmillan; New York.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (1994): "Embodied Knowledge: Thinking with the Body in Critical Medical Anthropology." In: Borofsky, Robert (ed.) (1994): *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*. McGraw-Hill

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Lock, Margaret M. (1987): "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology." In: *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 1, (Mars., 1987, pp. 6-41. Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the American Anthropological Association.

Schick, Vanessa R.; Rima, Brandi N. & Calabrese, Sarah K. (2010): "Evulvalution: The Portrayal of Women's External Genitalia and Physique across Time and the Current Barbie Doll Ideals." In: *Journal of Sex Research*, Volume 48, Issue 1, 2010, pp. 74-81.

Schreiner, Knut (2011): "Rockens siste subkultur?" In: *Morgenbladet*, 11.-17. mars 2011, pp 32-33.

Shilling, Chris (1993): "The Body and Social Theory." Sage Publications; London.

Shukla, Suhag A., esq. (2012): "Yoga Won't Wreck Your Body But May Make You More Hindu." In: *Huffpost Healty Life*, posted January 10, 2012 at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/suhag-a-shukla-esq/yoga-wont-wreck-your-body\\_b\\_1195754.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/suhag-a-shukla-esq/yoga-wont-wreck-your-body_b_1195754.html)? (Accessed: April 8, 2012)

Shweder, Richard A. and LeVine, Robert A. (red.) (1997) [1984]: “Culture Theory – Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion.” Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

Shweder, Richard A. and Good, Byron (eds.) (2005): “Geertz by His Colleagues.” University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Silverstone, Roger, Eric Hirsch & David Morley (1992): “Information and communication technologies and the moral economy of the household.” In: Roger Silverstone & Erich Hirsch (eds) (1992): *Consuming Technologies – Media and information in domestic spaces*. Routledge; London and New York.

Singh, Devendra & Young, Robert K. (1995): “Body Weight, Waist-to-Hip Ratio, Breasts, and Hips: Role in Judgments of Female Attractiveness and Desirability for Relationships.” In: *Ethology and Sociobiology*, Volume 16, Issue 6, November 1995, Pages 483–507.

Singleton, Mark (2005): “Salvation through Relaxation: Proprioceptive Therapy and its Relationship to Yoga.” In: *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, volume 20, No. 3, 2005 pp. 289-304.

Singleton, Mark (2008): “The Classical Reveries of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Constructive Orientalism.” In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Singleton, Mark (2010): “Yoga Body – The origins of Modern Posture Practice.” Oxford University Press; Oxford.

Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): “Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives.” Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Sjoman, N.E. (1999) [1996]: “The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace.” Abhinav Publications; New Delhi.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Smith, Benjamin Richard (2007): "Body, Mind and Spirit? Towards an Analysis of the Practice of Yoga." In: *Body Society* 2007; 13; 25.

Smith, Benjamin Richard (2008) "'With Heat Even Iron Will Bend': Discipline and Authority in Ashtanga Yoga." In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Srinivas, Krishna Ravi (2007): "Intellectual Property Rights and Traditional Knowledge – The Case of Yoga." In: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 27/28 (Jul. 14-20, 2007), pp. 2866-2867+2869-2871.

Srinivas, M. N. (1967): "Social Change in Modern India." University of California Press; Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Stern, Eddie (2012): "Sheetal Is a Punk Rocker, or How the NYT Wrecks Yoga." In: *Huffpost Healty Life*, posted January 17, 2012 at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-stern/yoga-health\\_b\\_1195500.html?ref=yoga](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-stern/yoga-health_b_1195500.html?ref=yoga) (Accessed: January 19, 2012.)

Stern, Marc (2008): "The Fitness Movement and the Fitness Center Industry, 1960-2000." *Business and Economic History On-line*, Vol. 6 (2008). Business and History Conference, 2008. URL: <http://thebhe.org/publications/BEonline/2008/stern.prf>.

Strathern, Andrew J. (1996): "Body Thoughts." Michigan Press.

Strauss, Sarah (2000): "Locating yoga: ethnography and transnational practice." In: Amit-Talai, Vered (ed.) (2000): *Constructing the Field: Ethnographic Fieldwork in Contemporary World*. Routledge; London and New York.

Strauss, Sarah (2002a): "'Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate': The Production of Yoga in a Transnational World." In: *History and Anthropology*, 13:3, 231-251.

Strauss, Sarah (2002b): "The Master's Narrative: Swami Sivananda and the Transnational Production of Yoga." In: *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 39, No 2/3, Special Double Issue: Dialogues (May-Dec., 2002), pp. 217-241.

Strauss, Sarah (2005): "Positioning Yoga – Balancing Acts Across Cultures." Berg; Oxford & New York.

Strauss, Sarah (2008): "'Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate': The Production of Yoga in a Transnational World." In: Singleton, Mark & Byrne, Jean (eds.) (2008): *Yoga in the Modern World – Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series; London & New York.

Sutcliffe, Steven and Marion Bowman (eds.) (2000): "Beyond New Age – Exploring Alternative Spirituality." Edinburgh University Press; Edinburgh.

Sutcliffe, Steven (2000): "'Wandering stars': Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World." In: Sutcliffe, Steven and Marion Bowman (2000) (eds.): *Beyond New Age – Exploring Alternative Spirituality*. Edinburgh University Press; Edinburgh.

Swenson, David (1999). "Ashtanga Yoga – "The Practice Manual": An Illustrated Guide To Personal practice." Ashtanga Yoga Productions, Autsin.

Syman, Stefanie (2010): "The Subtle Body – The Story of Yoga in America." Farrar, Straus and Giroux; New York.

Thompson, Craig J. and Hirschman, Elizabeth C. (1995): "Understanding the Socialized Body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-Conceptions, Body Images, and Self-Care Practices." In: *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Sep., 1995), pp. 139-153.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt (2005): "Friction – An Ethnography of Global Connection." Princeton University Press; Princeton & Oxford.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Tumbat, Gülnur and Belk, Russel W. (2011): "Marketplace Tensions in Extraordinary Experience." In: *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (June 2011), pp. 42-61.

Turner, Victor (1973): "The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goal." In: *History of Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Feb., 1973), pp. 191-230.

Turner, Victor (1974): "Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors – Symbolic Action in Human Society." Cornell University Press; Ithaca and London.

Turner, Victor (1979) [1964]: "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage." In: Lessa, William A. & Evon Z. Vogt (eds.) (1979): *Reader in comparative religion – An anthropological approach, fourth edition*. HarperCollinsPublishers.

Turner, Victor (1992) [1972]: "The Anthropology of Performance." PAJ Publications; New York.

Turner, Victor (1997) [1969]: "The Ritual Process – Structure and Anti-Structure." Aldine de Gruyter; New York.

Twigg, Julia (2011): "Modern Asceticism and Contemporary Body Culture." In: Peeters, Evert; Van Molle, Leen & Wils, Kaat (eds.) (2011): *Beyond Pleasure: Cultures of Modern Asceticism*. Berghan Books.

Tylor, Edward B. (1979) [1873]: "Animism." In: Lessa, William A. & Evon Z. Vogt (eds.) (1979): *Reader in comparative religion – An anthropological approach, fourth edition*. HarperCollinsPublishers.

Tönnies, Ferdinand (2001) [1887]: "Community and Civil Society." Cambridge University Press; Cambridge.

van der Veer, Peter (2009): "Global Breathing – Religious Utopias in India and China." In: Csordas, Thomas J. (ed.) (2009): *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on*

*Religion and Globalization*. University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.

van Haarskamp, Anton, Miranda Klaver, Johan Roeland & Peter Versteeg (eds.) (2006): "Playful Religion – Challenges for the Study of Religion." Eburon Delft; Delft.

Vargas, Rosemany (2005): "Ashtanga City – the westerners guide to Mysore." Yoga Bums LCC; USA.

Venkataraman, Swaminathan (2011a): "The Audacity of Ignorance." In: *Open Magazine*, 25 February 2011. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/international/the-audacity-of-ignorance>  
Accessed: 07 December 2011.

Venkataraman, Swaminathan (2011b): "Disguised Hinduphobia." In: *Open Magazine*, 7 March 2011. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/international/disguised-hinduphobia> Accessed: 07 December 2011.

Wacquant, Loïc (2004): "Body and Soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer." Oxford University Press; Oxford & New York.

Wacquant, Loïc (2005): "Carnal Connections: On Embodiment, Apprenticeship, and Membership." In *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 28, No. 4, Winter 2005.

Wagner, Roy (1986): "Symbols That Stand for Themselves." The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

Wallace, Anthony F.C. (1979): "Revitalization Movements" In: Lessa, William A. & Evon Z. Vogt (eds.) (1979): *Reader in comparative religion – An anthropological approach, fourth edition*. HarperCollinsPublishers.

Washington, Robert E. and Karen, David (2001): "Sport and Society." In: *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2001. 27: 187-212.

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

Weber, Max (2008) [1904-5, trans. 1958]: "The Protestant Ethic and the spirit of Capitalism." In: Lambek, Michael (ed.) (2008): *A reader in the Anthropology of Religion – second edition*. Blackwell Publishing; Malden and Oxford.

West, Harry G. (2007): "Ethnographic Sorcery." The University of Chicago Press; Chicago and London.

West, Lois A. (2001): "Negotiating Masculinities in American Drinking Subcultures." In: *The Journal of Men's Studies*. Volume 9, Number 3, Spring 2001, pp. 371-392.

Wikan, Unni (1992): "Beyond the Words. The Power of Resonance." In: *American Ethnologist* 1992, Vol.19. no. 3. 460-482.

Willerslev, Rane (2007): "Soul Hunters – Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs." University of California Press; Berkely, Los Angeles & London.

Womack, Mari (2010): "The Anthropology of Health and Healing." Altamira Press, a Division of Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, inc; Lanham, New York, Toronto and Plymouth, UK.

Wuthnow, Robert J. (2011): "Taking Talk Seriously: Religious Discourse as Social Practice." In: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 50, is. 1 (March 2011), pp. 1-21.

Yogananda, Paramhansana (1946): "Autobiography of a Yogi." The Philosophical Library; New York.

Young, Damon A. (2009): "Bowling to your Enemies: Courtesy, Budō, and Japan." In: *Philosophy East and West*, Volume 59, Number 2, April 2009, pp. 188-215.

Yuasa, Yasuo (1987): "The Body – Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory." SUNY series in Buddhist Studies; State University of New York Press; Albany.



Zimmermann, Francis (1992): "Gentle Purge: The Flower Power of Āyurveda." In: Leslie, Charles and Young, Allen (eds.) (1992): *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge*. University of California Press; Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford.

Zutshi, Vikram (2012): "Down and Out in Mysore: The Seamy Side of Spiritual Tourism." In: *Elephant Journal*, posted July 6, 2012 at <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/07/down-and-out-in-mysore-the-seamy-side-of-spiritual-tourism-vikram-zutshi/> Accessed: August 27th, 2012.

**Magazines:**

Gemini (2009): Gemini, nr 4, December 2009.

**"Other" web-sources:**

AN – "Ashtanga News": <<http://ashtanganews.com>>

1: Changes in Ashtanga Teacher Standards, August 14, 2008

<http://ashtanganews.com/2008/08/14/changes-in-ashtanga-teacher-standards/>

2: Continuing the Conversation on Ashtanga Teacher Standards Changes, August 19, 2008

<http://ashtanganews.com/2008/08/19/continuing-the-conversation-on-ashtanga-teacher-standards-changes/>

TCC – "The Confluence Countdown": < <http://theconfluencecountdown.com>>

Authored by Bobbie Allen and Steve Cahn.

1: More video of Guruji, plus Nancy Gilgoff thoughts on Moon Days and Saturdays, MARCH 22, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/03/22/more-video-of-guruji-plus-nancy-gilgoff-thoughts-on-moon-days-and-saturdays/>

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

2: On the question of Mysore, how about chill and just practice?, MARCH 23, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/03/23/on-the-question-of-mysore-how-about-chill-and-just-practice/>

3: “This is Ashtanga.”, MARCH 26, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/03/26/this-is-ashtanga/#comments>

4: Mysore then versus Mysore now, MARCH 27, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/03/27/mysore-then-versus-mysore-now/>

5: My final word on Mysore and Ashtanga (Jai Rama!), MARCH 28, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/03/28/my-final-word-on-mysore-and-ashtanga-jai-rama/>

6: A brief history of yoga mats, MARCH 29, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/03/29/a-brief-history-of-yoga-mats/>

7: An Australian Take on the “Jois” Controversy, MARCH 31, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/03/31/an-australian-take-on-the-jois-controversy/>

8: The oldest Ashtanga vs. more ‘authentic’ Ashtanga, APRIL 5, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/04/05/the-oldest-ashtanga-vs-more-authentic-ashtanga/>

9: An Ashtangi’s problem with yoga festivals, APRIL 6, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/04/06/an-ashtangis-problem-with-yoga-festivals/>

10: Jois Yoga opens in Greenwich — here’s what the studio says about it, APRIL 8, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/04/08/jois-yoga-opens-in-greenwich-heres-what-the-studio-says-about-it/>

11: Jois Yoga backers to give \$12 million for UVa contemplative studies program, APRIL 11, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/04/11/jois-yoga-backers-to-give-12-million-for-uva-contemplative-studies-program/>

12: Tim Miller reminds us what's important, APRIL 11, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/04/11/tim-miller-reminds-us-whats-important/>

13: Coverage of Greenwich Jois Yoga opening offers more insight into project, APRIL 19, 2012

<http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/04/19/coverage-of-greenwich-jois-yoga-opening-offers-more-insight-into-project/>

14: The Good News and the Bad News: Ashtanga Giveth and Taketh Away, June 10, 2012 <http://theconfluencecountdown.com/2012/06/10/the-good-news-and-the-bad-news-ashtanga-giveth-and-taketh-away/>

Newsletter from Yoga Journal:

Erica Rodefer, Yoga Journal <newsletters06@yogajournal.com> July 24, 2008

Received by e-mail.

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## Appendixes

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

### Ashtanga Yoga Mantra

~  
Om

vande gurunam caranaravinde  
sandarshita svatma sukha va bodhe  
nih sreyaase jangalika yamane  
samsara halahala mohasahantyai  
abahu purushakaram  
shankacakrasi dharinam  
sahasra shirasam svetam  
pranamami Patanjalin  
Om

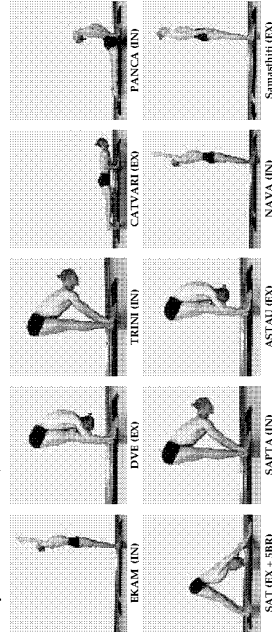
~  
I pray to the lotus feet

of the supreme Guru  
who teaches the good knowledge,  
showing the way  
to knowing the selfawakening great happiness;  
who is the doctor of the jungle,  
able to remove the poison  
of the ignorance of conditioned existence.

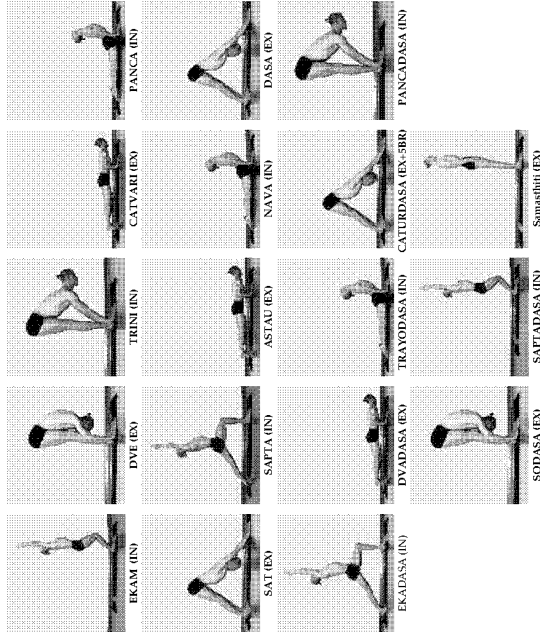
To Patanjali, an incarnation of Adisesa,  
white in color with 1000 radiant heads  
(in his form as the divine serpent, Ananta),  
human in form below the shoulders  
holding a sword  
(discrimination),  
a wheel of fire  
(discus of light, and a conch  
(divine sound)

to him, I prostrate.  
~

### Surya Namaskara A - repeat 5 times



### Surya Namaskara B - repeat 5 times



<sup>223</sup> All charts in these appendixes are taken from AshtangaYoga.info

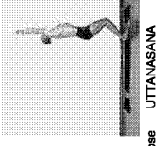
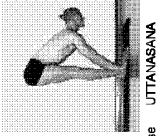
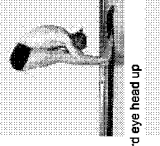
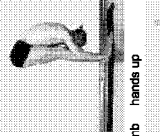
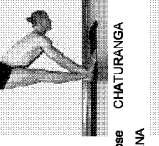
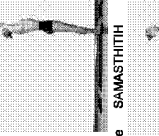
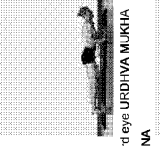
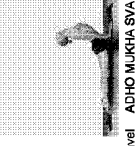
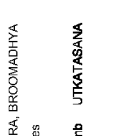




Vinyasa count sun salutations and standing sequence primary series:

-2-

**Ashtanga Yoga** © AshtangaYoga.info

<p>2 EX nose UTTANASANA</p> 	<p>8 EX nose UTTANASANA</p> 
<p>3 IN third eye head up</p> 	<p>9 IN thumb hands up</p> 
<p>4 EX nose CHATURANGA DANDASANA</p> 	<p>- EX nose SAMASTHITHI</p> 
<p>5 IN third eye URDHVA MUKHA SVANASANA</p> 	<p>SURYANAMASKARAB   Repeat 5 times VINYASA: 17 DRISTI: ANGUSTA MA DYA, NASAGRAI, NABI CHAKRA, BROOMADHYA repeat 5 times</p>
<p>6 EX navel ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA</p> 	<p>1 IN thumb UTKATASANA</p> 

© AshtangaYoga.info

-1-

**Ashtanga Yoga** © AshtangaYoga.info

**Surya Namaskara**

Further explanations: AshtangaYoga.info

**ASHTANGA YOGA MANTRA**

Om

varde guruntam caranavinde  
sandsarshia svalima sukha va bodhe  
nih sreyase jargalika yanane  
samsara halahala mohasahantyal

abahu purushakaram  
shankacakraasi: charinam  
sahasra shirasam svetam  
pranamami Palanjalam

Om

**SURYA NAMASKARA A** | Repeat 5 times

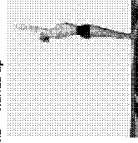
VINYASA: 9

DRISTI: ANGUSTA MA DYA, NASAGRAI,

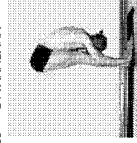
NABI CHAKRA, BROOMADHYA

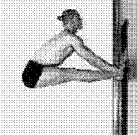
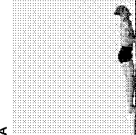



repeat 5 times

1 IN thumb hands up



2 EX nose UTTANASANA



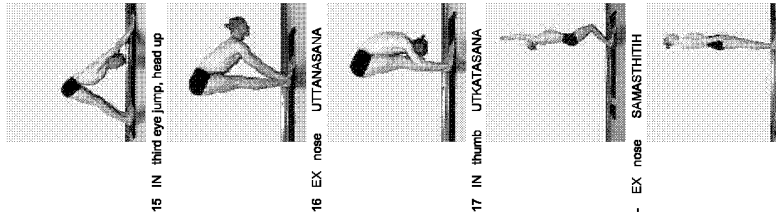
<p>3 IN third eye head up</p> 	<p>4 EX nose CHATURANGA DANDASANA</p> 
<p>5 IN third eye URDHVA MUKHA SVANASANA</p> 	<p>6 EX navel 5BR ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA</p> 
<p>7 IN third eye jump, head up</p> 	

© AshtangaYoga.info

"Pay attention – Listen to your heart!"

-4-

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

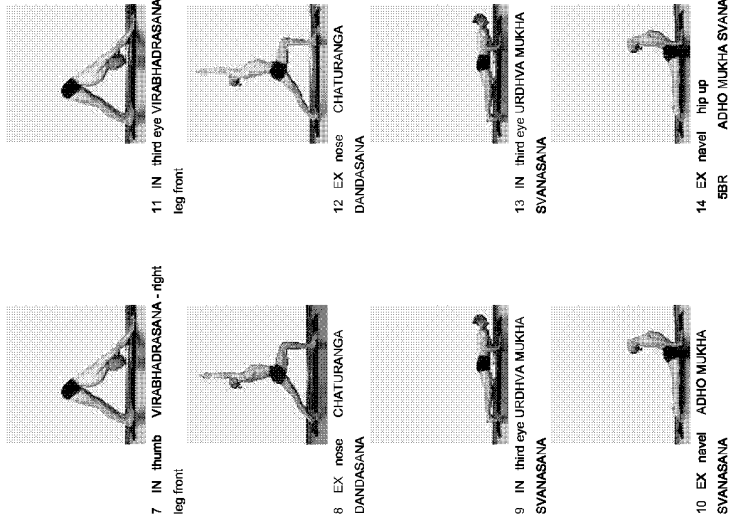


Update: 08.12.2004 - Copyright by  
AshtangaYoga.info

© AshtangaYoga.info

-3-

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info



© AshtangaYoga.info

Inhale

## Fundamental Asana

For proper use:

- Vinyasas are numbered through from Samasthithi to Samasthithi, but only bold lines are practised.
- The breathing to the Vinyasa is showed as IN / EX. Every Vinyasa has one breath to hold and additional breaths printed in brackets.
- Above the Vinyasa count for a position the name of the Asana is given, with the number of Vinyasas from Samasthithi to Samasthithi, the number which represents the Asana, and the Dristi ( point of gaze).

Further explanations:  
Ashanga Yoga.info

### PADANGUSTHASANA

VINYASA: 3

ASANA: 2

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 (IN) jump the legs half a foot apart

(EX) take big toes

IN head up

2 EX head down

5BR PADANGUSTHASANA



3 IN head up

(EX) hold position

(IN) come up

EX Samasthithi

PADA HASTASANA

VINYASA: 3

ASANA: 2

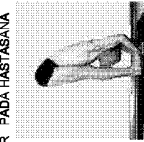
DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 (IN) jump the legs half a foot apart

(EX) hands beneath foot

2 EX head down

5BR PADA HASTASANA



3 IN Head up

(EX) Hold position

(IN) come up

EX Samasthithi

### UTTHITA TRIKONASANA

VINYASA: 5

ASANA: 2,4

DRISTI: HASTAGRAI

1 IN right leg back

2 EX grab right big toe

(IN) look up

5BR UTTHITA TRIKONASANA



(EX) look down

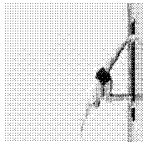
3 IN come-up, turn

4 EX grab left big toe

(IN) look up

5BR UTTHITA TRIKONASANA

(EX) look down



(EX) look down

3 IN come up, turn

4 EX left hand to the ground

(IN) look up

5BR UTTHITA PARSVAKONASANA

(EX) look down

5 IN come up

- EX Samasthithi

### PARAVRITTA PARSVAKONASANA

VINYASA: 5

ASANA: 2,4

DRISTI: HASTAGRAI

1 IN right leg back

2 EX left arm over right knee, hand to the ground

(IN) look up

5BR PARAVRITTA PARSVAKONASANA

(EX) look down

5 IN come up

- EX Samasthithi

### UTTHITA PARSVAKONASANA

VINYASA: 5

ASANA: 2,4

DRISTI: HASTAGRAI

1 IN right leg back

2 EX right hand to the ground

(IN) look up

5BR UTTHITA PARSVAKONASANA

(EX) look down

3 IN come up, turn

4 EX right arm over left knee, hand to the ground

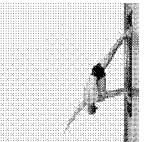
(IN) look up

5BR PARAVRITTA PARSVAKONASANA

(EX) look down

5 IN come up

- EX Samasthithi

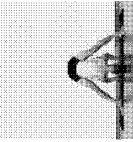


”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

**PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA A**

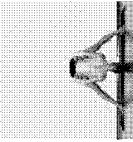
- VINYASA: 5
- ASANA: 3
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN jump right leg back, hands to the waist
- 2 EX hands to the ground
- (IN) look up
- 3 EX head to the ground
- 5BR PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA A



- 4 IN head up
- (EX) hold position
- 5 IN hands to the waist, come up
- EX Samasthith (hold position)

**PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA B**

- VINYASA: 5
- ASANA: 3
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN right leg back, spread arms
- 2 EX hands to the waist
- (IN) look up
- 3 EX head to the ground
- 5BR PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA B



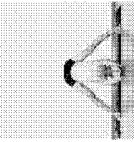
- 4 IN come up
- (EX) hold position
- 5 IN spread arms

-3-

- EX Samasthith

**PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA C**

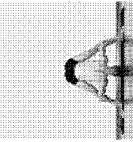
- VINYASA: 5
- ASANA: 3
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN right leg back, spread arms
- 2 EX hands behind back
- (IN) look up
- 3 EX head to the ground
- 5BR PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA C



- 4 IN come up
- (EX) hold position
- 5 IN spread arms
- EX Samasthith

**PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA D**

- VINYASA: 5
- ASANA: 3
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN right leg back, hands to the waist
- 2 EX grab big toes
- (IN) look up
- 3 EX head to the ground
- 5BR PRASARITA PADOTTANASANA D



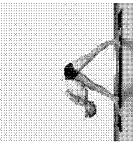
- 4 IN head up
- (EX) hold position

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

- 5 IN hands to the waist, come up
- EX Samasthith

**PARSVOTTANASANA**

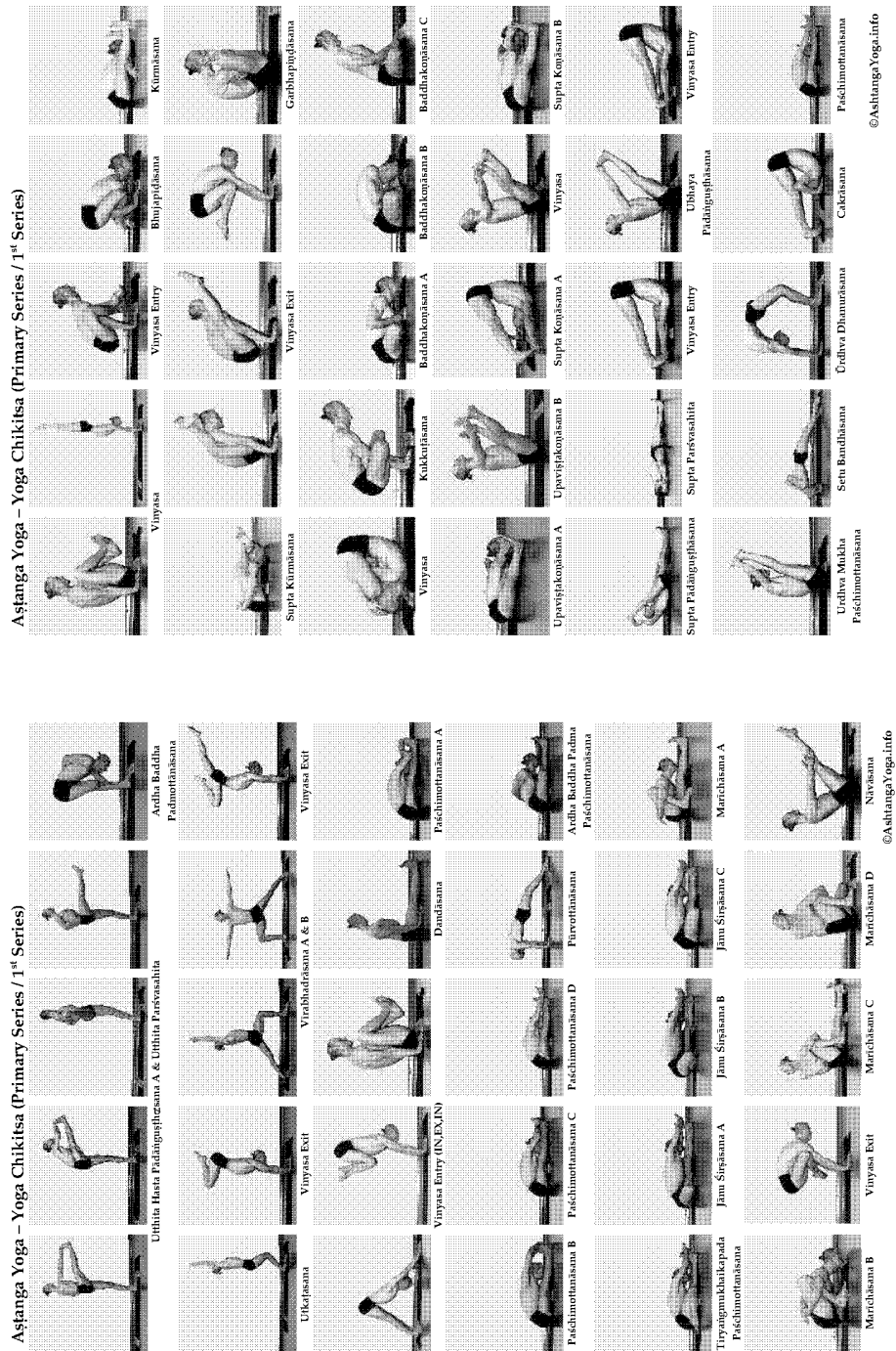
- VINYASA: 5
- ASANA: 2,4
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN jump right leg back, hands behind back
- 2 EX bend over right leg
- 5BR PARSVOTTANASANA



- 3 IN come up, turn
- 4 EX bend over left leg
- 5BR PARSVOTTANASANA
- 5 IN come up
- EX Samasthith

Update: 08.12.2004 - Copyright by  
AshtangaYoga.info

**Appendix 2: The rest of the primary series – Yoga Chikitsa. Asanas and vinyasa count**



”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © Ashtanga Yoga.info

**Primary Series  
(Yoga Chikitsa)**

For proper use:

- Vinyasas are numbered through from Samasthithi to Samasthithi, but only bold Inus are practised.
- The breathing to the Vinyasa is shown as IN / EX. Every Vinyasa has one breath to hold and additional breaths printed in brackets.
- Above the Vinyasa count for a position the name of the Asana is given, with the number of Vinyasas from Samasthithi to Samasthithi, the number which represents the Asana, and the Dristi ( point of gaze).

Further explanations:  
AshtangaYoga.info

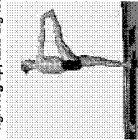
**UTTHITA HASTA PADANGUSTHASANA /  
UTTHITA PARS/ASAHITA**

VINYASA: 14

ASANA: 2,4,7,9,11,14

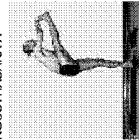
DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI / PARSVA

1 IN right leg up, take big toe



2 EX bend forward

**5BR UTTHITA HASTA  
PADANGUSTHASANA A**



-1-

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

1 IN right leg up, bind

2 EX bend down

**5BR ARDHA BADDHA  
PADMOTTANASANA**



3 IN head up

(EX) hold position

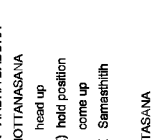
4 IN come up

5 EX Samasthithi

6 IN left leg up, bind,

7 EX bend down

**5BR ARDHA BADDHA  
PADMOTTANASANA**



8 IN head up

(EX) hold position

9 IN come up

- EX Samasthithi

**UTKATASANA**

VINYASA: 13

ASANA: 7

DRISTI: URDHVA

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utkatasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

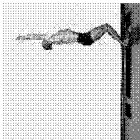
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN jump

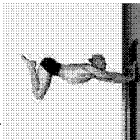
**5BR UTKATASANA**

-2-



(EX) hands to the floor

8 IN up



9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

12 IN jump, head up

13 EX Utkatasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

**VIRABHADRASANA A B**

VINYASA: 16

ASANA: 7,8,9,10

DRISTI: URDHVA / HASTAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utkatasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN right foot front

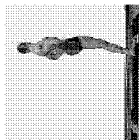
**5BR VIRABHADRASANA A**

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

3 IN head up

4 EX leg to the right

**5BR UTTHITA PARS/ASAHITA**



5 IN leg to front

6 EX leg up to the forehead

7 IN hands to the waist:

**5BR UTTHITA HASTA  
PADANGUSTHASANA B**



(EX) leg down

8 IN left leg up, take big toe

9 EX bend forward

**5BR UTTHITA HASTA  
PADANGUSTHASANA A**

10 IN head up

11 EX leg to the left

**5BR UTTHITA PARS/ASAHITA**

12 IN leg to front

13 EX leg up to the forehead

14 IN hands to the waist:

**5BR UTTHITA HASTA  
PADANGUSTHASANA B**

- EX Samasthithi

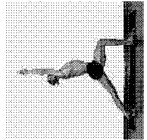
**ARDHA BADDHA PADMOTTANASANA**

VINYASA: 9

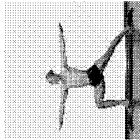
ASANA: 1,2,6,7

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshtangaYoga.info



- 8 EX turn to left  
 5BR VIRABHADRASANA A  
 9 IN left foot front  
 5BR VIRABHADRASANA B



- 10 EX turn to right  
 5BR VIRABHADRASANA B  
 (IN) held position  
 (EX) hands to the floor

- 11 IN up, left leg straight, right leg bent



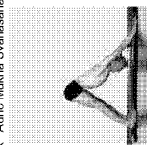
- 12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 15 IN jump, head up  
 16 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

### PASCHIMATTANASANA A

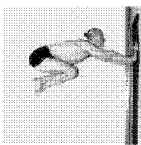
VINYASA: 16  
 ASANA: 9

-3-

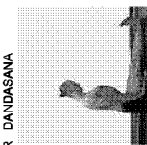
- DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI  
 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana



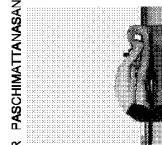
- 7 IN up



- (EX) land, hands beside upper legs  
 5BR DANDASANA



- 8 IN take big toes, arms straight, head up  
 9 EX bend forward  
 5BR PASCHIMATTANASANA A



- 10 IN head up, arms straight

© AshtangaYoga.info

## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshtangaYoga.info

- (EX) hands to the floor  
 11 IN up  
 12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 15 IN jump, head up  
 16 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

### PASCHIMATTANASANA B

VINYASA: 16  
 ASANA: 9

#### DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI

- 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN up

- (EX) land, hands beside upper legs  
 5BR DANDASANA

- 8 IN hands over toes, arms straight, head up  
 9 EX bend forward  
 5BR PASCHIMATTANASANA B



- 10 IN head up, arms straight  
 (EX) hands to the floor

- 11 IN up  
 12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

-4-

- 15 IN jump, head up  
 16 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

### PASCHIMATTANASANA C

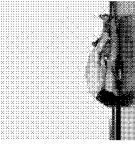
VINYASA: 16  
 ASANA: 9

#### DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI

- 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN up  
 (EX) land, hands beside upper legs  
 5BR DANDASANA

- 8 IN grab around foot, arms straight, head up

- 9 EX bend forward  
 5BR PASCHIMATTANASANA C



- 10 IN head up, arms straight  
 (EX) hands to the floor

- 11 IN up  
 12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 15 IN jump, head up  
 16 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

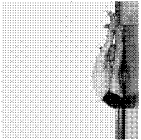
© AshtangaYoga.info

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

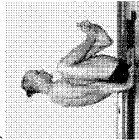
**Ashtanga Yoga** - © Ashtanga Yoga.info

**PASCHIMATTANASANA D**

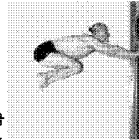
- VINYASA: 16  
 ASANA: 9  
 DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI  
 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN up  
 (EX) land, hands beside upper legs  
 8 IN grab wrist around foot, arms straight, head up  
 9 EX bend forward  
 5BR PASCHIMATTANASANA D



- 10 IN head up, arms straight  
 (EX) hands to the floor

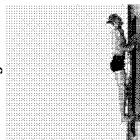


- 11 IN up



-5-

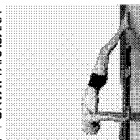
- 12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana



- 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 15 IN jump, head up  
 16 EX Utanasana  
 IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

**PURVATTANASANA**

- VINYASA: 15  
 ASANA: 8  
 DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN up  
 (EX) Dandasana; hands back  
 8 IN lift hips up  
 5BR PURVATTANASANA



- 9 EX Dandasana  
 10 IN up  
 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © Ashtanga Yoga.info

- 14 IN jump, head up  
 15 EX Utanasana  
 IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

**ARDHA BADDHA PADMA PASHIMATTANASANA**

- VINYASA: 22  
 ASANA: 8,15  
 DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI  
 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN up  
 (EX) land, right leg in bound lotus  
 (IN) head up  
 8 EX bend forward



- 5BR ARDHA BADDHA PADMA PASHIMATTANASANA  
 9 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 10 IN up  
 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 14 IN up  
 (EX) land, left leg in bound lotus  
 (IN) head up  
 15 EX bend forward

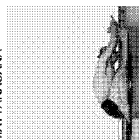
-6-

**5BR ARDHA BADDHA PADMA PASHIMATTANASANA**

- 16 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 17 IN up  
 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 21 IN jump, head up  
 22 EX Utanasana  
 IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

**TRIANG MUKHA EKA PADA PASHIMATTANASANA**

- VINYASA: 22  
 ASANA: 8,15  
 DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI  
 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN jump  
 (EX) land, right leg beside hip  
 (IN) head up  
 8 EX bend forward  
 5BR TRIANG MUKHA EKA PADA PASHIMATTANASANA



- 9 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor



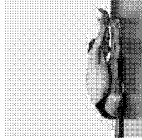
## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshtangaYoga.info

- 10 IN up  
 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 14 IN jump  
 (EX) land, left leg beside hip  
 (IN) head up  
 15 EX bend forward  
**5BR TRIANG MUKHA EKA PADA**  
**PASHIMATTANASANA**  
 16 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 17 IN up  
 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 21 IN jump, head up  
 22 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

### JANU SIRSASANA A

- VINYASA: 22  
 ASANA: 8,15  
 DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI  
 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN jump  
 (EX) land, right leg bent  
 (IN) head up  
 8 EX bend forward  
**5BR JANU SIRSASANA A**

-7-



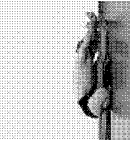
- 9 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 10 IN up  
 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 14 IN jump  
 (EX) land, left leg bent  
 (IN) head up  
 15 EX bend forward  
**5BR JANU SIRSASANA A**  
 16 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 17 IN up  
 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 21 IN jump, head up  
 22 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi

### JANU SIRSASANA B

- VINYASA: 22  
 ASANA: 8,15  
 DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI  
 1 IN hands up  
 2 EX Utanasana  
 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshtangaYoga.info

- 7 IN jump  
 (EX) land, right leg bent  
 (IN) head up  
 8 EX bend forward  
**5BR JANU SIRSASANA B**  
 9 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 10 IN up  
 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 14 IN jump  
 (EX) land, left leg bent  
 (IN) head up  
 15 EX bend forward  
**5BR JANU SIRSASANA B**  
 16 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 17 IN up  
 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 21 IN jump, head up  
 22 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi



- 3 IN head up  
 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 7 IN jump  
 (EX) land, right leg bent  
 (IN) head up  
 8 EX bend forward  
**5BR JANU SIRSASANA C**



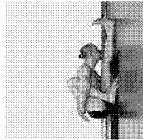
- 9 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 10 IN up  
 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 14 IN jump  
 (EX) land, left leg bent  
 (IN) head up  
 15 EX bend forward  
**5BR JANU SIRSASANA C**  
 16 IN head up  
 (EX) hands to the floor  
 17 IN up  
 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
 21 IN jump, head up  
 22 EX Utanasana  
 - IN come up  
 (EX) Samasthithi  
**MARICHTYASANA A**

## Appendixes

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshangaYoga.info

- VINYASA: 22
- ASANA: 8,15
- DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN jump
- (EX) land, right leg bent
- (IN) head up
- 8 EX bend forward
- 5BR MARICHYASANA A



- 9 IN head up
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 10 IN up
- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 14 IN jump
- (EX) land, left leg bent
- (IN) head up
- 15 EX bend forward
- 5BR MARICHYASANA A
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 17 IN up
- 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 21 IN jump, head up
- 22 EX Utihasana

-9-

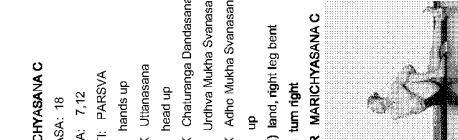
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthih
- MARICHYASANA B
- VINYASA: 22
- ASANA: 8,15
- DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN jump
- (EX) land, right leg bent, left leg in lotus
- (IN) head up
- 8 EX bend forward
- 5BR MARICHYASANA B



- 9 IN head up
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 10 IN up
- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 14 IN jump
- (EX) land, left leg bent, right leg in lotus

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshangaYoga.info

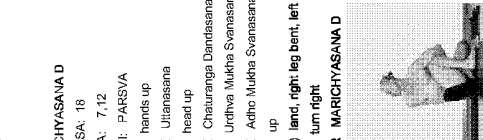
- (IN) head up
- 15 EX bend forward
- 5BR MARICHYASANA B
- 16 IN head up
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 17 IN up
- 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 21 IN jump, head up
- 22 EX Utihasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthih
- MARICHYASANA C
- VINYASA: 18
- ASANA: 7,12
- DRISTI: PARSVA
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) land, right leg bent
- (IN) turn right
- 5BR MARICHYASANA C



- (EX) hands to the floor,
- 8 IN up
- 9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

-10-

- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 12 IN up
- (EX) land, left leg bent
- (IN) turn left
- 5BR MARICHYASANA C
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 13 IN up
- 14 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 15 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 16 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 17 IN jump, Head up
- 18 EX Utihasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthih
- MARICHYASANA D
- VINYASA: 18
- ASANA: 7,12
- DRISTI: PARSVA
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) land, right leg bent, left leg in lotus
- (IN) turn right
- 5BR MARICHYASANA D



- (EX) hands to the floor
- 8 IN up
- 9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 12 (IN) up  
(EX) land, left leg bent, left leg in lous  
(IN) turn left.
- 5BR MARICHYASANA D  
(EX) hands to the floor
- 13 IN Up
- 14 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 15 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 16 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 17 IN Jump, Head up
- 18 EX Utanasana
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthith

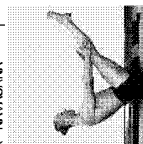
**NAVASANA**

VINYASA: 13  
ASANA: 7

- DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up

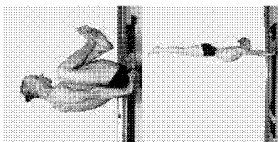
(EX) land | repeat 3 to 6 times  
(IN) lift legs and arms |

5BR NAVASANA |



- (EX) hands to the floor |
- 8 IN up |

-11-



- 9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 12 IN jump, head up
- 13 EX Utanasana
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthith

**BHUUJAPIDASANA**

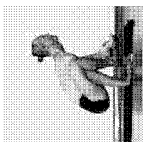
VINYASA: 15

ASANA: 7,8

- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN jump

(EX) lock the feet  
(IN) head up

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info



- 8 EX chin firm over ground
- 5BR BHUUJAPIDASANA



- 9 IN come up again

(EX) hold

(IN) Titibhasana

10 EX Bakasana

(IN) up

11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

14 IN jump, head up

15 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthith

**KURMASANA / SUPTA KURMASANA**

VINYASA: 16

ASANA: 7,9

DRISTI: BROOMADHYA

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

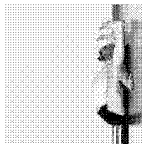
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN Titibhasana

(EX) go down

-12-

- (IN) heels up, arms straight
- 5BR KURMASANA



- (EX) hands beneath knees
- 8 IN Titibhasana

(EX) left leg behind head

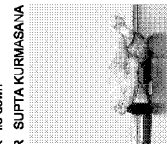
(IN) up

(EX) right leg behind head

(IN) up

9 EX lie down

5BR SUPTA KURMASANA

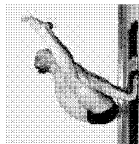


- (IN) hands beneath knees

(EX) Dwi Padda Sirasana



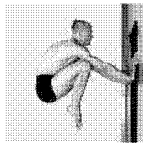
10 IN Titibhasana



11 EX Bakasana

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

## Ashtanga Yoga – © AshtangaYoga.info



- (IN) up
- 12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 15 IN jump, head up
  - 16 EX Utthanasana
  - IN come up
  - (EX) Samasthith

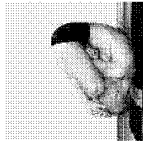
### GARBHA PINDASANA

- VINYASA: 14  
ASANA: 8  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utthanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN up  
(EX) straight legs  
(IN) Dandasana  
8 EX hands through and to chin



- (IN) head up  
9 EX hands to forehead, roll back  
| Repeat 9 times

-12-



- (IN) roll up | turn 360° clockwise  
(EX) arms out
- 10 IN up
  - 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 14 IN jump, head up
  - 15 EX Utthanasana
  - IN come up
  - (EX) Samasthith

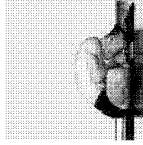
### KUKKUTASANA

- VINYASA: 15  
ASANA: 9  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utthanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN up  
(EX) straight legs  
(IN) Dandasana  
8 EX Padmasana



- 9 IN come up  
10 EX forehead to toes

## Ashtanga Yoga – © AshtangaYoga.info

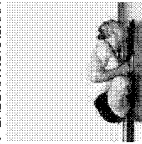


- (EX) arms out  
10 IN up
- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 14 IN jump, head up
  - 15 EX Utthanasana
  - IN come up
  - (EX) Samasthith

### BADDHA KONASANA A / B

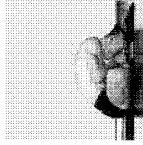
- VINYASA: 17  
ASANA: 8, 10  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utthanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN up  
(EX) fold legs  
(IN) straight back  
8 EX chin to ground

### 5BR BADDHA KONASANA A



- 9 IN come up  
10 EX forehead to toes

-14-



- 11 IN come up  
5BR BADDHA KONASANA C
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 12 IN up
  - 13 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 14 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 15 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 16 IN jump, head up
  - 17 EX Utthanasana
  - IN come up
  - (EX) Samasthith

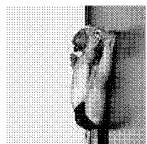
### UPAVISTHA KONASANA A / B

- VINYASA: 15  
ASANA: 8, 9  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI / URDHVA
- 1 IN hands up
  - 2 EX Utthanasana
  - 3 IN head up
  - 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 7 IN up
- (EX) leg beside arms, grab feet  
(IN) head up  
8 EX fold down

### 5BR UPAVISTHA KONASANA A

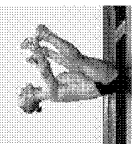
## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshtangaYoga.info

-15-



- 9 IN head up, arms up  
(EX) legs up, grab feet  
10 IN head up

### 5BR UPAVISTHA KONASANA B



(EX) hands to the floor, between the legs

- 11 IN up  
12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
15 IN jump, head up  
16 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthithi

### SUPTA KONASANA

VINYASA: 16  
ASANA: 8  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI

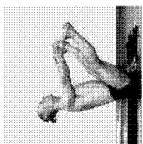
- 1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN up  
(EX) lie down  
8 IN legs up

(EX) grab big toes

### 5BR SUPTA KONASANA



- 9 IN roll up



(EX) touch down

- 10 IN head up  
(EX) hands to the floor, between the leg  
11 IN up  
12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
15 IN jump, head up  
16 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthithi

### SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA / SUPTA

PARSVASAHITA  
VINYASA: 28  
ASANA: 11,19  
DRISTI: PARVA

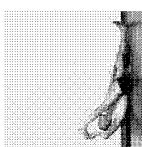
## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshtangaYoga.info

-16-

- 1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN up  
(EX) lie down

- 8 IN right leg up, head down  
9 EX chin to shirbone

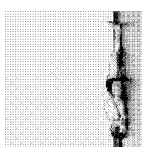
### 5BR SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA



- 10 IN head down

- 11 EX leg to the right

### 5BR SUPTA PARVASAHITA



- 12 IN right leg up, head down

### 13 EX SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA

- 14 IN head down  
15 EX lie down  
16 IN left leg up, head down  
17 EX chin to shirbone

### 5BR SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA A

- 18 IN head down  
19 EX leg to the left  
5BR SUPTA PARVASAHITA

- 20 IN left leg up, head down

### 21 EX SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA A

- 22 IN head down

- 23 EX lie down  
24 IN Chakrasana  
(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana  
25 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
26 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
27 IN jump, head up  
28 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthithi

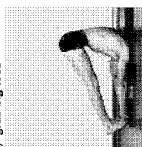
### UBHAYA PADANGUSTHASANA

VINYASA: 15

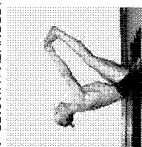
ASANA: 9

DRISTI: URDHVA

- 1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN up  
(EX) lie down  
8 IN legs up  
(EX) grab big toes



### 9 IN roll up 5BR UBHAYA PADANGUSTHASANA



(EX) hands to the ground

## Appendixes

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

**Ashtanga Yoga** – © Ashanga Yoga.info

-17-

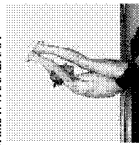
- 11 IN head up
- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 13 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 14 IN jump, head up
- 15 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 16 IN jump, head up
- 17 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith

**URDVA MUKHA PASCHIMATTANASANA**

- VINYASA: 17
- ASANA: 10
- DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) lie down
- 8 IN legs up
- (EX) grab foot



- 9 IN roll up
- 10 EX bend forward
- 5BR URDVA MUKHA PASCHIMATTANASANA



**Ashtanga Yoga** – © Ashanga Yoga.info

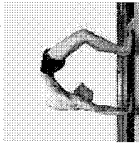
-18-

- 15 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith

**URDHA DHANURASANA**

- VINYASA: 15
- ASANA: 9
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) lie down
- 8 IN lift legs and hands
- (EX) prepare
- 9 IN lift up
- 5BR URDHA DHANURASANA

- | Repeat 3 times;
- | Each time hands
- | nearer to feet



- 10 EX down
- 11 IN Chakrasana

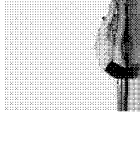


- (EX) Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 14 IN jump, head up

- 15 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith

**PASCHIMATTANASANA**

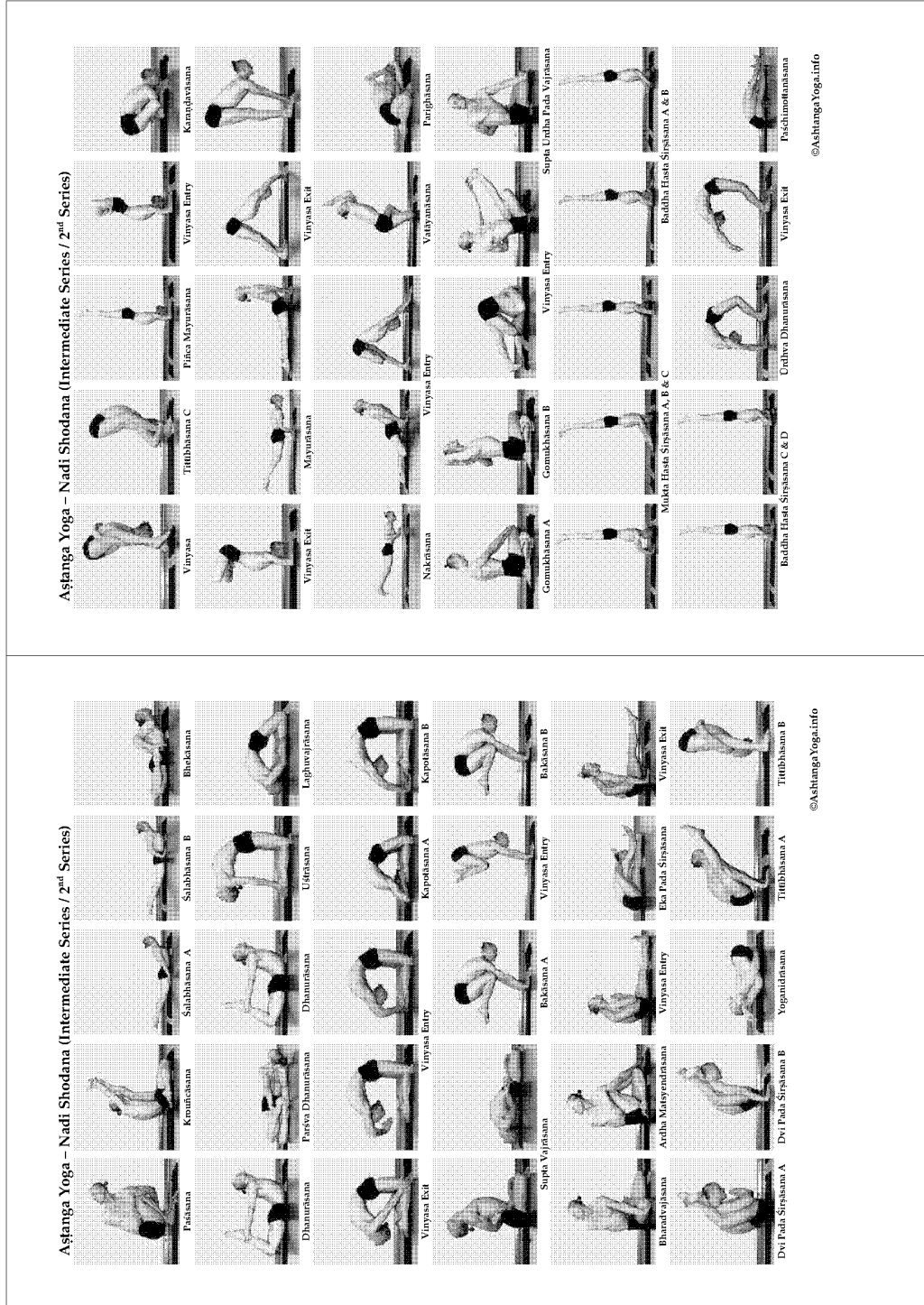
- VINYASA: 16
- ASANA: 9
- DRISTI: PADHAYORAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) Dandasana
- 8 IN take big toes, arms straight, head up
- 9 EX bend forward
- 5BR PASCHIMATTANASANA



- 10 IN head up, Arms straight;
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 11 IN up
- 12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 15 IN jump, head up
- 16 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith

Update: 08.12.2004 – Copyright by Ashanga Yoga.info

Appendix 3: Intermediate series – Nadi Shodana. Asanas and vinyasa count



”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Ashtanga Yoga – © AshtangaYoga.info

Intermediate Series  
(Nadi Shodana)

For proper use:

- Vinyasas are numbered through from Samasthithi to Samasthithi, but only hold these the prescribed time.
- The number of Vinyasa is always as IN / EX. Every Vinyasa has one breath to lead and additional breaths printed in brackets.
- Above the Vinyasa count for a position the name of the Asana is given, with the number of Vinyasas from Samasthithi to Samasthithi, the number which represents the Asana, and the DRISTI ( point of gaze).

Further explanations:  
AshtangaYoga.info

PASASANA

VINYASA: 14

ASANA: 7,8

DRISTI: PARSVA

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN turn to the left

8 EX turn to the right

9 IN turn to the left

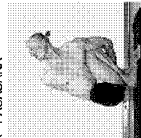
10 EX turn to the right

11 IN turn to the left

12 EX turn to the right

13 IN turn to the left

14 EX turn to the right



(EX) turn front:

8 IN turn to the right

9 BR PASASANA

-1-

Ashtanga Yoga – © AshtangaYoga.info

(IN) grab left foot, head up

15 EX chin to shinbone

5BR KROUNCHASANA

16 IN head up

(EX) hands to the floor

17 IN up

18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

21 IN jump, head up

22 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

SALABHASANA

VINYASA: 9

ASANA: 5,6

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

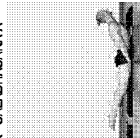
5 IN lift head and legs

6 BR SALABHASANA A

(EX) turn hands

6 IN lift head and legs

7 BR SALABHASANA B



(EX) turn hands

6 IN lift head and legs

7 BR SALABHASANA B



-2-

(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana

7 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

8 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

9 IN jump, head up

10 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

BHEKASANA

VINYASA: 9

ASANA: 5

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN lift feet

(EX) toes to the ground

(IN) lift chest

5BR BHEKASANA



(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana

6 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

7 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

8 IN jump, head up

9 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

DHANURASANA

VINYASA: 9

ASANA: 5

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

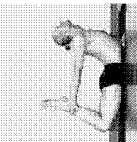
1 IN hands up



## Ashtanga Yoga - © Ashanga Yoga.info

- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN lift feet  
(EX) gap ankles  
(IN) lift up

5BR DHANURASANA



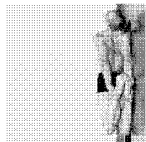
- 6 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 7 EX Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 8 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 9 EX Utihasana
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthithi

### PARSVA DHANURASANA / DHANURASANA

- VINYASA: 13  
ASANA: 6,8,9  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
  - 2 EX Utihasana
  - 3 IN head up
  - 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 5 IN lift feet  
(EX) gap ankles  
(IN) Dhanurasana
  - 6 EX roll on right side

5BR PARSVA DHANURASANA

-3-



7 IN Dhanurasana



- 8 EX roll on left side
- 5BR PARSVA DHANURASANA
- 9 IN roll up
- 5BR DHANURASANA
- (EX) Chaturanga Dandasana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 12 IN jump, head up
- 13 EX Utihasana
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthithi

### USTRASANA

- VINYASA: 15  
ASANA: 8  
DRISTI: BROOMADHYA
- 1 IN hands up
  - 2 EX Utihasana
  - 3 IN head up
  - 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 7 IN up  
(EX) land on knees  
(IN) hands on waist, bend back
  - 8 EX hands to heels

## Ashtanga Yoga - © Ashanga Yoga.info

5BR USTRASANA

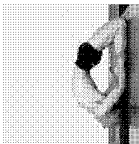


- 9 IN hands to waist, come up  
(EX) hands to ground
- 10 IN up
- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 14 IN jump, head up
- 15 EX Utihasana
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthithi

### LAGHUVAJRASANA A/B

- VINYASA: 15  
ASANA: 8  
DRISTI: BROOMADHYA
- 1 IN hands up
  - 2 EX Utihasana
  - 3 IN head up
  - 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 7 IN up  
(EX) land on knees  
(IN) hands on waist, bend back
  - 8 EX hands to ankles

5BR LAGHUVAJRASANA



-4-

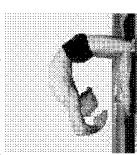
9 IN come up, hands to waist,  
(EX) hands to ground



- 10 IN up
- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 14 IN jump, head up
- 15 EX Utihasana
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthithi

### KAPOTASANA A/B

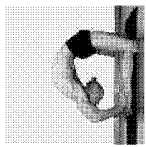
- VINYASA: 16  
ASANA: 8,9  
DRISTI: BROOMADHYA
- 1 IN hands up
  - 2 EX Utihasana
  - 3 IN head up
  - 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 7 IN up  
(EX) land on knees  
(IN) hands on waist, bend back



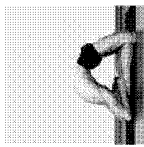
8 EX hands to heels

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

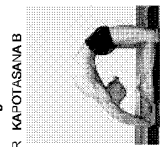
**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info



**5BR KAPOTASANA A**



**9 IN straight arms**  
**5BR KAPOTASANA B**



**(EX) hands to waist**

10 IN come up

**(EX) hands to ground**

11 IN up

12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

15 IN jump, head up

16 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

**(EX) Samasthithi**

**SUPTA VAIRASANA**

VINYASA: 15

ASANA: 9

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

-5-

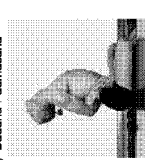
- 2 EX Utanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up

**(EX) land between arms**

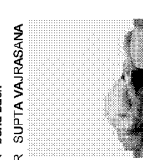
**(IN) Dandisana**

**8 EX Padmasana**

**(IN) Baddha Padmasana**



**9 EX bend back**  
**5BR SUPTA VAIRASANA**

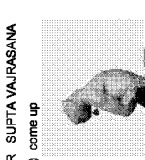


**(IN) come up** | repeat

**(EX) bend back** | 3-7 times

**5BR SUPTA VAIRASANA**

**(IN) come up**



**(EX) hands to the floor**

10 IN up

11 EX Chaturanga Dandisana

12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 14 IN jump, head up
- 15 EX Utanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthithi**

**BAKASANA A**

VINYASA: 13

ASANA: 7

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

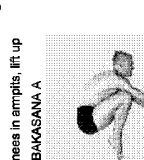
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN up

**(EX) feet between hands on the ground**

**(IN) knees in armpits, lift up**

**5BR BAKASANA A**



**8 IN up**

**9 EX Chaturanga Dandisana**

**10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana**

**11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana**

**12 IN jump, head up**

**13 EX Utanasana**

- IN come up

**(EX) Samasthithi**

**BHARDAVAJASANA**

VINYASA: 20

ASANA: 8,14

DRISTI: PARSVA

1 IN hands up

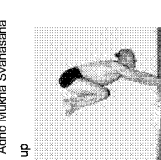
2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

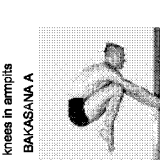
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

-6-

- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up



**(EX) knees in armpits**  
**5BR BAKASANA A**



**8 IN up**

**9 EX Chaturanga Dandisana**

**10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana**

**11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana**

**12 IN jump, head up**

**13 EX Utanasana**

- IN come up

**(EX) Samasthithi**

**BHARDAVAJASANA**

VINYASA: 20

ASANA: 8,14

DRISTI: PARSVA

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshangaYoga.info

- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) land between arms
- (IN) Dandasana
- 8 EX left leg beside hip, right leg in lotus
- (IN) turn right

5BR BHARDAVAJASANA



(EX) turn front, hands to ground

- 9 IN up
- 10 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 11 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 12 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 13 IN up
- (EX) land between arms
- (IN) Dandasana
- 14 EX right leg beside hip, left leg in lotus
- (IN) turn left

5BR BHARDAVAJASANA

- 15 IN up
- 16 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 17 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 18 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 19 IN jump, head up
- 20 EX Utthanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthithi

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA

- VINYASA: 20  
ASANA: 8,14  
DRISTI: PARSVA

-7-

- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utthanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) land between arms
- (IN) Dandasana
- 8 EX right leg over left leg
- (IN) turn right

5BR ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA



(EX) turn front, hands to ground

- 9 IN up
- 10 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 11 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 12 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 13 IN up
- (EX) land between arms
- (IN) Dandasana
- 14 EX left leg over right leg
- (IN) turn left

5BR ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA

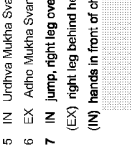
- (EX) turn front, hands to ground
- 15 IN up
- 16 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 17 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 18 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 19 IN jump, head up
- 20 EX Utthanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthithi

## Ashtanga Yoga - © AshangaYoga.info

EKA PADA SIRSASANA

- VINYASA: 22  
ASANA: 8,15  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
  - 2 EX Utthanasana
  - 3 IN head up
  - 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 7 IN jump, right leg over right arm
  - (EX) right leg behind head
  - (IN) hands in front of chest

5BR EKA PADA SIRSASANA



(EX) bend forward

- 8 EX bend forward
- 5BR EKA PADA SIRSASANA



9 IN come up

- (EX) hands to the floor
- 10 IN up



- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

-8-

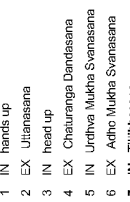
- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 14 IN jump, left leg over left arm
- (EX) right leg behind head
- (IN) hands in front of chest
- 15 EX bend forward
- 5BR EKA PADA SIRSASANA
- 16 IN come up
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 17 IN up
- 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 21 IN jump, head up
- 22 EX Utthanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthithi

DWI PADA SIRSASANA

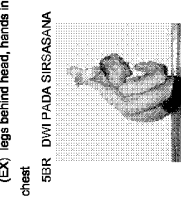
- VINYASA: 14  
ASANA: 7  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
  - 2 EX Utthanasana
  - 3 IN head up
  - 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
  - 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
  - 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
  - 7 IN Tithhasana

(EX) legs behind head, hands in front of chest

- 5BR DWI PADA SIRSASANA



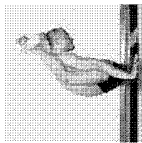
8 IN up



- 8 IN up

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshangaYoga.info



(EX) hold position

(IN) Tithhasana

9 EX Bakasana

(IN) up

10 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

11 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

12 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

13 IN jump, head up

14 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

**YOGANIDRASANA**

VINYASA: 13

ASANA: 8

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN up

(EX) lie down

6 IN legs up

(EX) legs behind head

5BR YOGANIDRASANA



-9-

9 IN Chakrasana

(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana

10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

12 IN jump, head up

13 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

**TITIBHASANA A / B / C**

VINYASA: 16

ASANA: 7,8,9

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

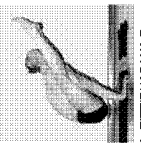
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

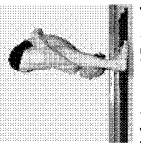
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN legs over arms

5BR TITIBHASANA A

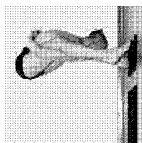


8 EX TITIBHASANA B

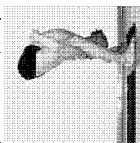


9 (IN) foot up | 5 steps forward

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshangaYoga.info

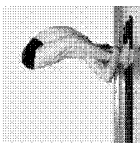


(EX) foot down | 5 steps backward



(IN) Tithhasana B

EX TITIBHASANA C



10 IN Tithhasana A

11 EX Bakasana

(IN) up

12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

15 IN jump, head up

16 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

**PINCHA MAYURASANA**

VINYASA: 13

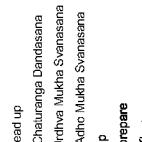
ASANA: 8

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

-10-



3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN up

(EX) prepare

6 IN lift up

5BR PINCHA MAYURASANA

12 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

14 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

15 IN jump, head up

16 EX Utanasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthithi

**KARANDAVASANA**

VINYASA: 15

ASANA: 9

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

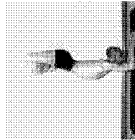
7 IN up

(EX) prepare

6 IN Pincha Mayurasana

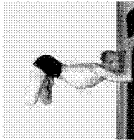
9 EX fold legs to lotus, downs

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info



5BR **KAPANDHASANA**

10 IN come up again



11 EX **Chaturanga Dandasana**

12 IN **Urdhva Mukha Svanasana**

13 EX **Adho Mukha Svanasana**

14 IN jump, head up

15 EX **Uttanasana**

- IN come up

(EX) **Samasthith**

**MAYURASANA**

VINYASA: 9

ASANA: 5

DRISTI: **NASAGRAI**

1 IN open feet, hands turned to floor, head up

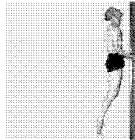
2 EX head between the arms

3 IN head up

4 EX jump back

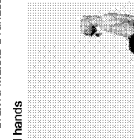
5 IN **MAYURASANA**

-11-



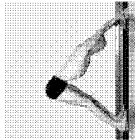
6 IN **Urdhva Mukha Svanasana** - with turned hands

(EX) feet to the ground

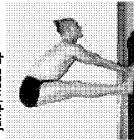


7 EX **Adho Mukha Svanasana** - with turned hands

hands



8 IN jump, head up



9 EX head between the arms

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshtangaYoga.info

- IN come up

(EX) **Samasthith**

**NAKRASANA**

VINYASA: 9

ASANA: 4

DRISTI: **NASAGRAI**

1 IN hands up

2 EX **Uttanasana**

3 IN head up

4 EX **NAKRASANA**



5 (IN) push up

(EX) hand

5 hops forward

5 hops backward

6 IN **Urdhva Mukha Svanasana**

7 EX **Adho Mukha Svanasana**

8 IN jump, head up

9 EX **Uttanasana**

- IN come up

(EX) **Samasthith**

**VATAYANASANA**

VINYASA: 20

ASANA: 7,12

DRISTI: **URDHVA**

1 IN right leg bound lotus

(EX) head between the arms

2 EX **Uttanasana**

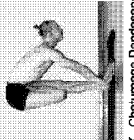
- right leg in lotus

-12-



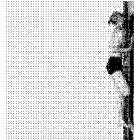
3 IN head up

- right leg in lotus



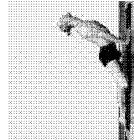
4 EX **Chaturanga Dandasana** - right leg in lotus

lotus



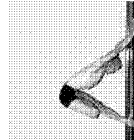
5 IN **Urdhva Mukha Svanasana** - right leg in lotus

lotus



6 EX **Adho Mukha Svanasana** - right leg in lotus

lotus

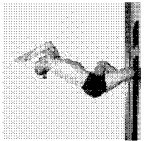


2 EX **Uttanasana**

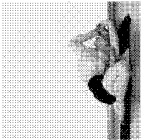
- right leg in lotus

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”


**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshangaYoga.info

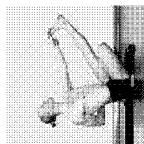
- 7 IN up
- (EX) right knee beside left foot
- SBR VATAYANASANA**
- 
- (EX) hands to the ground
- 8 IN up
- 9 EX Chatumaga Dandasana - right leg in lotus
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana - right leg in lotus
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana - right leg in lotus
- (IN) right leg down
- (EX) left leg in lotus
- 12 IN up
- (EX) left knee beside right foot
- SBR VATAYANASANA**
- (EX) hands to the ground
- 13 IN up
- 14 EX Chatumaga Dandasana - left leg in lotus
- 15 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana - left leg in lotus
- 16 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana - left leg in lotus
- 17 IN jump, head up - left leg in lotus
- 18 EX Utanasana - left leg in lotus
- 19 IN head up - left leg in lotus
- (EX) hold position - left leg in lotus
- 20 IN come up - left leg in lotus
- EX Samasthithi
- PARIGHASANA**
- VINYASA: 22
- IN come up

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © AshangaYoga.info

- (EX) Samasthithi
- GOMUKHASANA A / B**
- VINYASA: 22
- ASANA: 8,9,15,16
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI, URDHVA
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN jump
- (EX) land, right leg beside hip
- (IN) head up
- 8 EX bend forward
- SBR PARIGHASANA**
- 
- 9 IN head up
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 10 IN up
- 11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN jump
- (EX) land, left leg beside hip
- (IN) head up
- 8 EX bend forward
- SBR PARIGHASANA**
- 16 IN head up
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 17 IN up
- 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 21 IN jump, head up
- 22 EX Utanasana
- IN come up

-14-

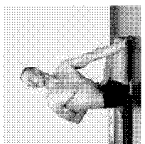
- 15 EX left leg over right leg, hands to knees
- SBR GOMUKHASANA A**
- 16 IN left arm up, right arm down
- SBR GOMUKHASANA B**
- (EX) hands to ground
- 17 IN up
- 18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 21 IN jump, head up
- 22 EX Utanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthithi
- SUPTA URDHVA PADA VAJRASANA**
- VINYASA: 22
- ASANA: 9,16
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI, PARSVA
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) lie down
- 8 IN legs up
- (EX) right leg in lotus, bind
- 
- 9 IN roll up



(EX) land

(IN) turn to right

5BR SUPTA URDHVA PADA VAJRASANA



(EX) turn front, hands to ground

10 IN up

11 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

12 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

13 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

14 IN up

(EX) lie down

15 IN legs up

(EX) right leg in lotus, bind

16 IN roll up

(EX) land

(IN) turn to right

5BR SUPTA URDHVA PADA VAJRASANA

(EX) turn front, hands to ground

17 IN up

18 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

19 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

20 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

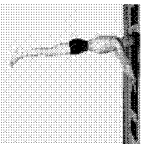
21 IN jump, head up

22 EX Utihasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthiith

7 IN up  
(EX) take position  
8 IN lift legs  
5BR MUKTA HASTA SIRSASANA B



9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

12 IN jump, head up

13 EX Utihasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthiith

MUKTA HASTA SIRSASANA C

VINYASA: 13

ASANA: 8

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utihasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

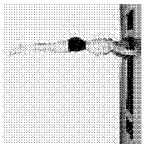
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN up

(EX) take position

8 IN lift legs

5BR MUKTA HASTA SIRSASANA C



9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
12 IN jump, head up  
13 EX Utihasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthiith

BADDHA HASTA SIRSASANA A

VINYASA: 13

ASANA: 8

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utihasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

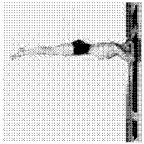
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN up

(EX) take position

8 IN lift legs

5BR BADDHA HASTA SIRSASANA A



9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

12 IN jump, head up

13 EX Utihasana

- IN come up

(EX) Samasthiith

BADDHA HASTA SIRSASANA B

VINYASA: 13

ASANA: 8

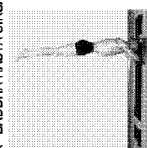
DRISTI: NASAGRAI

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

**Ashtanga Yoga** – © Ashanga Yoga.info

-17-

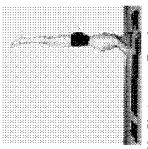
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) take position
- 8 IN lift legs
- 5BR BADDHA HASTA SIRŚASANA B



- 9 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 12 IN jump, head up
- 13 EX Utihasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith

**BADDHA HASTA SIRŚASANA C**

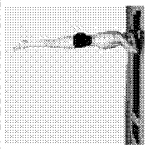
- VINYASA: 13
- ASANA: 8
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) take position
- 8 IN lift legs
- 5BR BADDHA HASTA SIRŚASANA C



- 9 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 12 IN jump, head up
- 13 EX Utihasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith

**BADDHA HASTA SIRŚASANA D**

- VINYASA: 13
- ASANA: 8
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) take position
- 8 IN lift legs
- 5BR BADDHA HASTA SIRŚASANA D



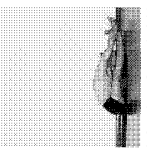
- 9 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 12 IN jump, head up
- 13 EX Utihasana

© Ashanga Yoga.info

**Ashtanga Yoga** – © Ashanga Yoga.info

-18-

- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utihasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) Dandāsana
- 8 IN take big toes, arms straight, head up
- 9 EX end forward
- 5BR PASCHIMATTANASANA



- 10 IN head up, Arms straight
- (EX) hands to the floor
- 11 IN up
- 12 EX Chaturanga Dandāsana
- 13 IN Urdhva Mukha Svānasana
- 14 EX Adho Mukha Svānasana
- 15 IN jump, head up
- 16 EX Utihasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthith

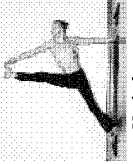
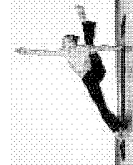
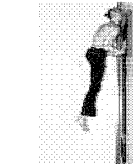
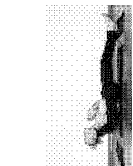
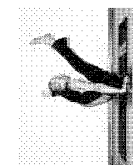
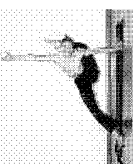
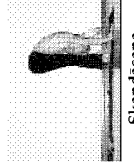
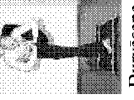
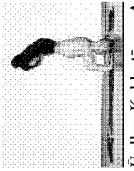
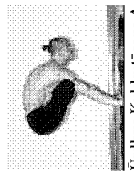
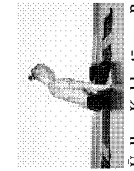
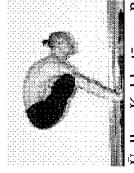


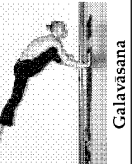
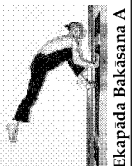
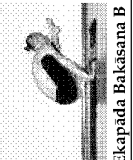
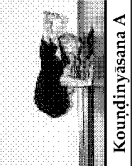
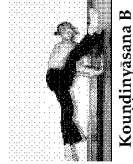
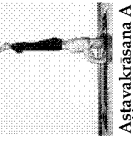

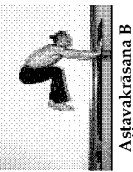


Update: 08.12.2004 – Copyright by  
Ashanga Yoga.info

© Ashanga Yoga.info











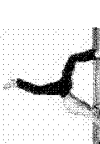



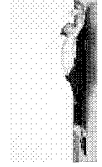

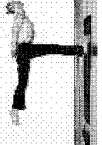
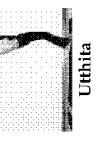
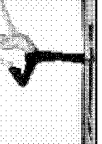
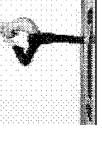



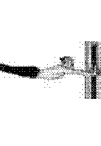
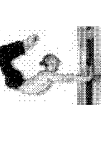

Appendix 3: Third series – Advanced A.

Aṣṭāṅga Yoga - Advanced Series A (3<sup>rd</sup> Series)

					
वसिष्ठसन	विश्वमित्रसन	विश्वमित्रसन	कश्यपसन	चकोरसन	भैरवसन
1	2	Vinyasa Exit	3	4	5
					
स्कन्दसन	दुर्वसन	उर्ध्वकुकुत्तसन क	उर्ध्वकुकुत्तसन क	उर्ध्वकुकुत्तसन ख	उर्ध्वकुकुत्तसन ख
6	7	Vinyasa Entry	8	Vinyasa Entry	9
					
उर्ध्वकुकुत्तसन ग	उर्ध्वकुकुत्तसन ग	गलवसन	एकपादककसन क	एकपादककसन ख	कौण्डिन्यसन क
Vinyasa Entry	10	11	12	13	14
					
कौण्डिन्यसन ख	अष्टवक्रसन क	अष्टवक्रसन क	अष्टवक्रसन ख	अष्टवक्रसन ख	बकसन
15	Vinyasa Entry	16	Vinyasa Entry	17	Between Sides

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

Aṣṭāṅga Yoga - Advanced Series A (3<sup>rd</sup> Series)

					
Matsyendrasana Pūrṇa	Viranchyāsana A	Viranchyāsana B	Viranchyāsana B	Viranchyāsana B	Viranchyāsana B
पूर्णमत्स्येन्द्रासन	विरञ्चासन क	विरञ्चासन ख	विरञ्चासन ख	विरञ्चासन ख	विरञ्चासन ख
18	19	Vinyasa Exit	Vinyasa Entry	Vinyasa Entry	20
					
Dvipada Viparita Daṅḍāsana	Ekapada Viparita Daṅḍāsana	Viparita Salabhasana	Bheruṅḍāsana	Ganda Bheruṅḍāsana	Supta Trivikrmasana
द्विपादविपरितदण्डासन	द्विपादविपरितदण्डासन	विपरितशलाभासन	भरुण्डासन	गन्द-भुण्डासन	सुप्तत्रिविक्रमासन
Vinyasa Entry	21	22	23	24	25
					
Hanumanasana	Dikasana A	Dikasana B	Utthita Trivikrmasana	Nata Rajasana A	Nata Rajasana B
हनुमानासन	दिकासन क	दिकासन ख	उत्थितत्रिविक्रमासन	नतराजासन क	नतराजासन ख
26	27	28	29	30	31
					
Raja Kapotāsana	Ekapada Raja Kapotāsana	Urdhva Dhanurāsana	Vikṣāsana	Viparita Cakrasana	Pashimottāsana
राजाकपोतासन	एकपादराजाकपोतासन	ऊर्ध्वधनुर्ासन	वृक्षासन	विपरितचक्रासन	पश्चिमोत्तानासन
32	33	34	Vinyasa	Vinyasa	35

© AshangaYoga.info

## Finishing Positions

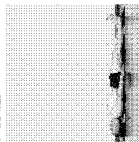
For proper use:

- Vinyasas are numbered through from Samasthihi to Samasthihi, but only bold lines are practised.
- In/EX Every Vinyasa has one breath to lead and additional breaths printed in brackets.
- Above the Vinyasa count for a position the name of the Asana is given, with the number of Vinyasas from Samasthihi to Samasthihi, the number which represents the Asana, and the Dristi ( point of gaze).

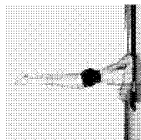
Further explanations:  
AshtangaYoga.info

### SALAMBHA SARVANGASANA

VINYASA: 13  
ASANA: 8  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN jump  
(EX) lie down  
5BR lie flat



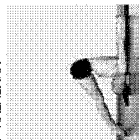
8 IN legs up  
10BR SALAMBHA SARVANGASANA



(EX) come down  
9 IN Chakrasana  
(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana  
10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
12 IN jump, head up  
13 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthihi

### HALASANA

VINYASA: 13  
ASANA: 8  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN jump  
(EX) lie down  
5BR lie flat  
(EX) feet to the ground  
8BR HALASANA

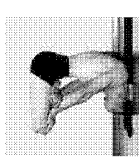


(IN) legs up

(EX) lie down  
9 IN Chakrasana  
(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana  
10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
12 IN jump, head up  
13 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthihi

### KARNAPIDASANA

VINYASA: 13  
ASANA: 8  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN jump through  
(EX) lie down  
5BR lie flat  
8 IN legs up  
(EX) feet to the ground  
8BR KARNAPIDASANA



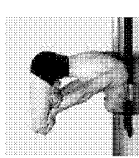
(IN) unfold  
(EX) lie down  
10 IN Chakrasana  
(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana  
11 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
12 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
13 IN jump, head up  
14 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthihi  
PINDASANA

## Appendix 4: Finishing sequence – vinyasa count

13 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthihi

### URDHVA PADMASANA

ASANA: 9  
DRISTI: NASAGRAI  
1 IN hands up  
2 EX Utanasana  
3 IN head up  
4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana  
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
7 IN jump through  
(EX) lie down  
5BR lie flat  
8 IN Salamba Sarvangasana  
(EX) fold legs in lotus  
9 IN hands to knees  
8BR URDHVA PADMASANA

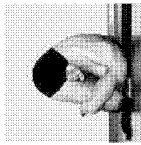


(IN) unfold  
(EX) lie down  
10 IN Chakrasana  
(EX) Chaturanga Dandasana  
11 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana  
12 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana  
13 IN jump, head up  
14 EX Utanasana  
- IN come up  
(EX) Samasthihi  
PINDASANA

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © Ashanga Yoga.info

- VINYASA: 14
- ASANA: 9
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Uttanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN jump through
- 8 IN Salamba Sarvangasana
- 9 (EX) fold legs in lotus
- 10 IN hands to knee
- 11 EX knees down, grip around knees
- 12 (IN) unfield
- 13 (EX) lie flat
- 14 IN PINDASANA



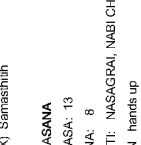
- (IN) unfield
- (EX) lie down
- 10 IN Chakrasana
- (EX) Chaturanga Dandasana
- 11 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 12 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 13 IN jump, head up
- 14 EX Uttanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthithi

- MATSYASANA**
- VINYASA: 13
- ASANA: 8
- DRISTI: BROOMADHIYA
- 1 IN hands up

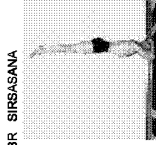
-3-

**Ashtanga Yoga** - © Ashanga Yoga.info

- 8 IN open chest
- 9 IN Chakrasana
- (EX) Chaturanga Dandasana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 12 IN jump, head up
- 13 EX Uttanasana
- IN come up
- (EX) Samasthithi

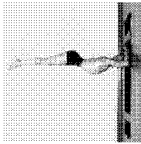


- SIRSASANA**
- VINYASA: 13
- ASANA: 8
- DRISTI: NASAGRAI, NABI CHACKRA
- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Uttanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up
- (EX) kneel down
- 8 IN lift legs (end head up)

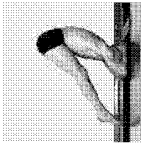


- 10BR SIRSASANA

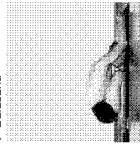
-4-



- EX Urdhva Dandasana
- 10BR
- IN legs up
- EX legs down
- repeat
- 10 times



- IN legs up
- 9 (EX) legs down
- 5BR Balasana



- (IN) up
- EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 12 IN jump, head up
- 13 EX Uttanasana
- IN come up

## Ashtanga Yoga - © Ashanga Yoga.info

(EX) Samasthiith

### BADDHA PADMASANA / YOGA MUDRA

VINYASA: 16

ASANA: 8,9

DRISTI: NASAGRAI / BROOMADHYA

- 1 IN hands up
- 2 EX Utanasana
- 3 IN head up
- 4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana
- 5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
- 6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana
- 7 IN up

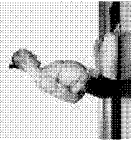
(EX) sit down

(IN) Dandasana

IN band arms

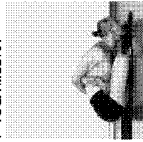
8 EX Padmasana

### 8BR BADDHA PADMASANA



9 EX dthi to the ground

### 8BR YOGA MUDRA



10 IN Baddha Padmasana

(EX) hands to the floor

11 IN up

9 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

10 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

11 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

12 IN jump, head up

-5-

## Ashtanga Yoga - © Ashanga Yoga.info

DRISTI: NASAGRAI

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN up

(EX) sit down

(IN) Dandasana

8 EX fold legs in lotus

(IN) Padmasana

(EX) hands to ground

9 IN up

### 10BR UTPLUTHI



10 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

11 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

12 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

13 IN jump, head up

14 EX Utanasana

15 IN hands up

- EX Samasthiith

### Mangala Mantra

Om

Svasi praja bhryaha pari pala yantam

Nya yena margena mahi mahistaha

Go brahmanebhyaha shubhamastu

nityam

Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu

Om

-6-

shanti shanti shanti

SAVASANA

1 IN hands up

2 EX Utanasana

3 IN head up

4 EX Chaturanga Dandasana

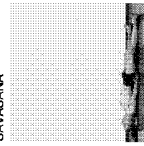
5 IN Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

6 EX Adho Mukha Svanasana

7 IN jump

(EX) lie down

SAVASANA



Update: 08.12.2004 - Copyright by

Ashanga Yoga.info

© Ashanga Yoga.info

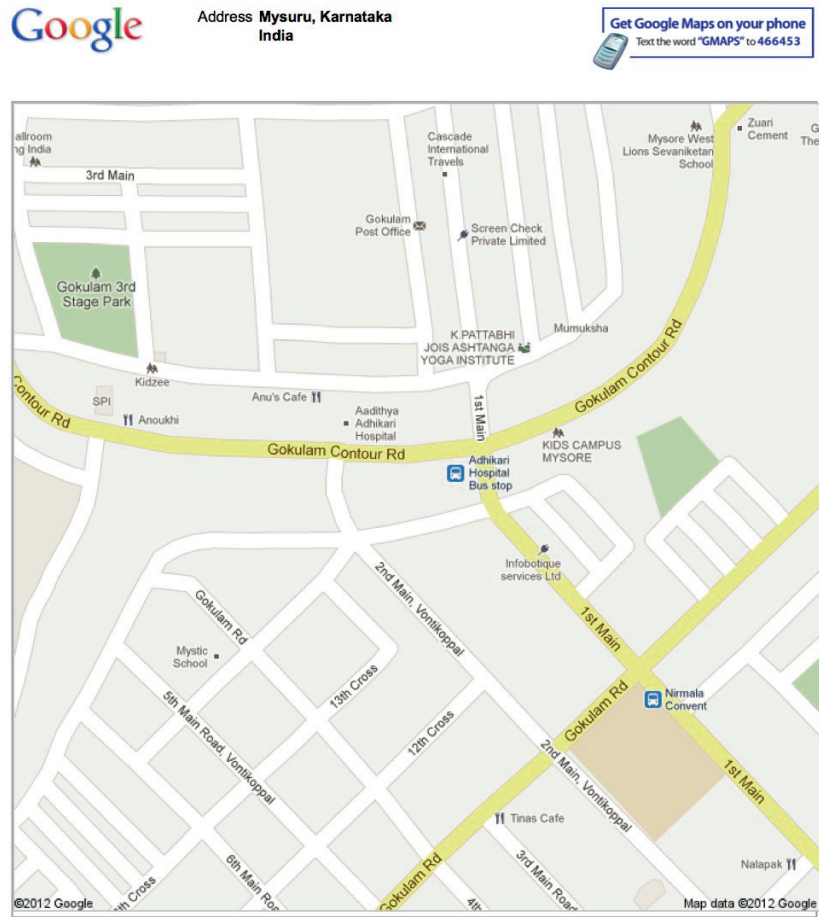
© Ashanga Yoga.info

”Pay attention – Listen to your heart!”

### Appendix 5: Maps of Gokulam, Mysore, India

Mysuru, Karnataka, India - Google Maps

[https://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s\\_q&hl=en&geo...](https://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geo...)



Appendixes

Mysuru, Karnataka, India - Google Maps

[https://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s\\_q&hl=en&geo...](https://maps.google.com/maps?f=q&source=s_q&hl=en&geo...)

