

## **The Yoga Industry and the Prostitution of Yoga**

### **Yoga in Free-Fall**

Yoga has become a phenomenon and we are witnessing its global free-fall... Its erosion and commercialisation are progressing at high speed.

The Sanskrit word 'Yoga', which is millennia old and which refers to the deepest and highest principle in Indian culture, has been polluted/defamed/tainted in the last couple of decades.

In my opinion Yoga is universally inherent to human nature. It is of all cultures and of all times! There is however only one culture that has cherished and developed yoga throughout thousands of years and has preserved it for posterity and that is India. Therefore, the Indian tradition is of immense value.

### **The Meaning of Yoga**

True and essential Yoga means 'to be one' and consequently 'to become one' as well.

The aim of Yoga is *moksha* or also *kaivalya*:

- *moksha* means 'liberation (of birth and death) and,
- *kaivalya* means 'absolute unity' or 'salvation/bliss'.

This goal requires sustained and committed effort over a long time-span. It is a continuous deepening through meditation that leads to in-depth and widened Awareness/Consciousness. It can also be described as a long-term purification process (Yama and Niyama), through which our personality is profoundly changed, as we develop benevolence, kindness and trust, to make us more Human. Through this process we can find the right attitude or inner environment (the right 'bhava'), essential for attaining Liberation or Oneness. Yoga is infinitely more than some physical practices that are beneficial for body and mind. These are just the crumbs that fell off the party table.

### **True Yoga**

If we are at the right wavelength, i.e. develop the right bhava, our eyes, ears and hearts will open. We will then learn to see with the 'reversed eye' and go from outside to inside, instead of from inside to outside.

I have been involved with the Yoga Federation's board for almost 50 years, first in the Belgian Yoga Federation and then in the current YFN (*Yoga Federation of the Dutch-Speaking in Belgium*). I have always proclaimed my priorities:

- I do not give a damn about the Federation, I care for Yoga.
- I don't give a damn about Yoga, I care for the aim of Yoga. Because if Yoga didn't have an aim, then the practice of Yoga wouldn't make any sense!
- I don't give a damn about the aim of Yoga, I care for the people! Because if there were no people, then the aim of Yoga wouldn't make any sense! The aim of Yoga is to liberate human beings!

That is why I always repeat – and I'm going in overdrive here – that Yoga is practiced 48 hours in a day! Yoga is indeed only for a minority because it is so demanding.

## **Yoga in the World**

Since 2014 India has a Minister of Yoga. This is good news, as India will be able to defend its millennia old traditions against worldwide misuse and inappropriate patents by mainly American yoga teachers and exploiters. One cannot take a patent on yoga techniques, as these belong to no-one and to everyone...

Yoga has also been recognised by UNESCO as intangible heritage. That is good news too. But then on the other hand I am sceptic about this yearly Yoga Day in the month of June. Despite good intentions, this celebration has hollowed out the meaning of Yoga and often misrepresents what Yoga really is. What is large-scale, often tends to derail...

Yoga is intimate in the first place and happens within a human being. In the olden days Yoga was taught from Guru to Sisya, from Guide to student. This was and should still be the best way. The student sometimes used to live with the Guru for years. Hence the value of the word "Guru". If so many Westerners have a deep distrust for the concept, then this is due to the pollution of Yoga, as can be seen in the number of fake gurus from India that have been roaming the world for the last century.

Luckily there is still wheat among the chaff. Many are called, few chosen.

The degradation of yoga is ubiquitous and this happened before in the Indian tradition too. The 'jewel of the lotus' is difficult to find, but it is always present. Our regional federation and the European Yoga Union (EYU) are not spared from this pollution either... A Yoga teacher is not a 'profession' in the normal sense of the word. It is rather a 'calling', a holy duty (dharma). There is no correct legal structure for this concept in our man-made society.

## **To Be or Not to Be**

In 1979 I was to preside the meeting of the Pedagogical Council of the EYU. Patrick Tomatis (secretary and Parisian) gave me the agenda the day beforehand and told me what the outcome had to be for each of the points. When I told him that not one of these points would be decided in that manner because of my conscientious objections, he replied that teachers like me (i.e. unpaid) should stop existing. I replied that they would never stop existing, but that teachers like him would disappear the day they stopped earning enough money...

Do not get me wrong: a yoga teacher is allowed to earn a living from teaching, but the exorbitant prices for some workshops or weekends show that there is a fundamental corruption going on. Pure Yoga should be free from pecuniary motives... Even some Indian 'gurus' request a month's wages for an initiation!

## **Don't Fight the Dark**

Swami Venkatesananda once taught us that if you are afraid of the dark, you shouldn't fight against the dark, but you should turn on the light switch and let there be light. In the same way, we shouldn't fight against the pollution. We should just continue to always refer to the 'jewel of the lotus', the 'sparkling of the diamond'...

Yoga is pure mysticism. It is the Way to the Essence of things, the Way to Self-Realisation, the Way to Divine Awareness, the Way to the 'Unio Mystica', the experience of Oneness.

I invite you all to walk this brilliant way that cannot be walked...

The aim of Yoga can be attained by **anyone** who cherishes this intense longing to reach it and who is willing to apply oneself.

From a place of love for THAT, Atma Muni (Lucien Mertens)