

Proceedings of  
the Yoga & Psyche  
Conference (2014)



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Edited by

Mariana Caplan and Gabriel Axel

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## PREFACE

MARIANA CAPLAN, PHD, MFT  
THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF INTEGRAL STUDIES  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA; APRIL, 2014

“One girl with courage is a revolution,” read the T-shirt that I won from my 12-year-young activist friend Samantha, in the raffle she held to raise awareness of the human trafficking that is occurring in the affluent northern San Francisco suburbs where we live. In my experience, most acts of greatness begin with a dream and are driven by conviction in one’s vision, courage, a willingness to risk both success and failure, and as much outside support as possible. In this way, my personal passion to integrate the fields of yoga and Western psychology—both of which have been my personal and professional paths of work for over 20 years—has now become a collective, global dream, of which the journal you are about to read is an important step.

In April 2014, smack in the middle of San Francisco’s financial district at the Hotel Whitcomb, I, in collaboration with The California Institute of Integral Studies—where I was a graduate student in my 20s and taught as an adjunct professor for 14 years throughout my 30s and early 40s—inaugurated and hosted The Yoga & Psyche Conference. Aside from some significant and important efforts initiated by Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health in earlier decades, it was the first academic conference in the Western world to integrate the fields of yoga and Western psychology. We approached yoga not through its commonly understood notion in the West as a series of physical postures, or asanas, but from its classical, eight-limbed approach that also includes: ethics, self-care, treatment of others, right-livelihood, posture, meditation, breath, and service. Similarly, psychology is envisioned as a nascent, 135-year-old field, which includes the new fields of neuroscience, trauma theory and research, and somatics, as well as important “mainstream” schools of psychology, including but not limited to CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy), attachment theory, positive psychology, neurolinguistic programming, and short-term therapies.

I had taught Yoga & Psyche seminars at universities, retreat centers, and yoga studios throughout the world since 2006, and it was very clear to me that not only was there a widespread interest in these subjects around the world, but that a number of extraordinary people were working independently towards this integration, teaching and publishing on different aspects of this integration. Yet I have always believed, and continue to believe, that we are far greater together than any of us alone, so I initiated the conference to find the people in the world like me: yogis—committed, long-term practitioners of yoga, whether they teach or not—who were also passionate about psychology; psychologists, counselors, and healing professionals who were interested in integrating yoga into their fields; scholars and/or scientists/neuroscientists who were researching these fields; and those who intuited that by bringing these fields together, an important contribution to consciousness, as well as personal and global healing, could take place.

One element of the conference that was central for me to include was an international presence—I wanted and needed to know who, around the world, was interested in what I loved. I had traveled the world since I was 15 years old, both personally, as a spiritual/yogic seeker, and professionally. I had my BA in cultural anthropology and to this day travel is still my greatest personal hobby. For me, the world really can be held in the palm of your hand, and I wanted to know not only what India was doing regarding yoga and psychology but other nations as well. The first evening of the conference, we discovered that fifteen countries and five continents were represented. Between the conference and the first global live distance training that I had since led, I have found that there are well over 25 countries around the world interested in this material, including people from: Philippines, Egypt, The Sudan, Sierra Leone, many European countries, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, Australia, Tasmania, Bali, and Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

The first evening of the conference, we invoked the psychological and yogic lineages of all those present in the room, including the great teachers and scholars who were presenting at or attending the conference. From there, there was a current of grace that permeated the conference for the next three days. I did not hear a harsh word spoken from anyone to anyone, even among the logistical stresses that myself and the organizers were facing.

Many of the great teachers presenting also attended the conference as students, taking notes, doing the exercises, and learning from their peers. Moreover, I came to know of some of the great pioneers of related fields who were attending the conference, among them, Eleanor Criswell, the



widow of and former collaborator with Thomas Hanna, who founded somatic psychology, and Janice Gates, who is singlehandedly reuniting the field of yoga therapy with its traditional roots and evolutionary possibility. Several of these guests will be invited to present in the next conference.

Of all the speakers in the conference, there was one notable surprise—Gabriel Axel, PhD (pending), the co-editor of this journal, and the man I selected to be responsible for bringing impeccable management, discernment, and intellectual rigor to the selection and execution of this journal. Gabriel was the youngest speaker at the conference, and also the most popular of all the presenting scholars who were not already renowned in their fields as well as published. Just under 30, Gabriel had written to me just after the paper submission deadline, apologizing and saying that he had just heard about the conference, was available by cell, and would work as quickly as possible and prioritize all things conference-related. He attached a CV and paper proposal abstract on enacting a comprehensive vision for the fusion of neurological and yogic sciences. I looked at his proposal and put him in the last available slot.

In the year it has taken to compile this volume for publication, Gabriel has become a colleague, friend, and one of my three favorite teachers of neuroscience, particularly as it relates to yoga, in the company only of Bessel van der Kolk and Peter Levine. He has worked tirelessly on this volume, in spite of, and throughout, his own teaching tour and relocation to Australia to conduct PhD research as a fellow at the University of Newcastle in Australia, and he has remained steadfastly committed to the publication of this volume.

Together, Gabriel and I have labored deep questions at the crux of compiling a volume at this novel crossroads, including but not limited to: 1) How can we begin to fuse the Western scientific and yogic spheres together in this first volume in a way that respects and voices their unique methodologies and parlances?; 2) How can we honor and respect both traditions—one from the East and the other from the West—while presenting the papers within the context of a Western academic journal and adhering to the protocol for academic papers in the Western world?; 3) How could we balance the predominant emphasis in this volume on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* text—one of many important texts that outlay a larger vision of yoga as opposed to the narrow but popular perspective of modern postural yoga (MPY)—with the vast, perhaps limitless, array of texts and approaches to yoga that can be integrated with developments in Western psychology to create many significant and historically unprecedented possibilities for healing in the world?; 4) How could we support, within the framework of academic peer review guidelines, the

meaningful poetic expressions of important presenters at the conference who have been important in shaping the field until now?; and 5) How would we set the tone in this volume for the aspect of this integration of fields that is highly relevant for the academic development of both the fields of psychology and yoga (which is making its way into Western academia as a field in itself and/or valuable asset for psychological studies)? We have humbly recognized and remained cognizant throughout that this journal is just a “rough draft” of a pristine body of data that has been, and will continue to be, studied and taught in major United States and Indian universities, and hopefully will soon spread to other countries.

We bring this offering to you as a beginning of a worldwide conversation, not an endpoint. We want to open the field so that we can learn what others are doing around the world, and to what disciplines, and aspects of their lives, they are finding the integration of yoga and psychology to be useful, effective, and healing. It is the sincere hope of those who have invested themselves in the conference that every other year when we meet again, we will come to know more people and learn more about what is happening around the world. We can continue to come together and teach each other and learn from each other, so that together we can do more than any of us alone.

## **Why Integrating Yoga and Psychology is Important Now**

Whether we want it to be this way or not, the movement towards globalization is all around us. Having been an avid world traveler from a young age, it is exciting to find that not only is anyone in the world a couple of airplane rides away, but now they are also a click away. The East-West movement that gained momentum in the late 1960s and early 1970s now includes every corner of the earth. We have the opportunity to blend not only yoga with Western psychology, but also other great religious and spiritual traditions from all over the world with the findings of psychology, science, medicine, and alternative and holistic healing modalities.

I am one of a growing number of spiritually-oriented psychologists, or psychologically-oriented spiritual practitioners, who believes that the psychology that is still emergent in the world—a mere 135 years in its inception as compared to the 3,000–5,000-year-old yoga tradition—is in fact the Western world’s contribution to spirituality, a path in itself, you could say, when placed in a spiritual context. Furthermore, as the globalization impulse, pace, and cyber-connectivity that pervades the West spreads to other developing countries, many of the psychological wounds,

“everyday traumas,” and psychological dysfunctions that afflict the Western psyche are being increasingly felt around the world. The gifts of Western psychology have then become not only critical to Western individuals, but, as we become an ever more globalized society, to the rest of the world.

## **The Fruits that Have Been Harvested and Those Yet to Come**

I began The Yoga & Psyche Project in 2011 with the intention of creating a published body of work on the subject, linking forces with others working in this area in order to create a greater outcome together. Since then, many fruits have emerged. In addition to this volume, we have:

- Completed and published a literature review and analysis (included in this volume) of all the academic studies and reviews of this integration to date and of closely related disciplines;
- Researched all popular books in English on this subject, which, combined with the above and the author’s own ideas and experience in this field, will be published as a book entitled *Yoga & Psyche* (Sounds True, TBA);
- Created a free, online dialogue series on the author’s website consisting of interviews and dialogues with pioneers worldwide in related disciplines to explore this integration;
- Completed a *Yoga & Psyche* workbook to help yoga teachers and practitioners integrate these skills into their teaching and personal practice;
- Created the first Yoga & Psyche Conference in spring 2014, from which the papers presented were drawn on to produce this volume, which included participation from more than 15 countries worldwide;
- Created an online education program (through live distance at least once per year, with the option available for CEs) on these subjects so that people can have access to this exploration from anywhere in the world.

What comes next depends upon you, the reader. If I have done my job well thus far, I have opened an already-open field, but have also named and thus grounded it into this earth, where there is as much space to grow as far as there are people who wish to contribute. Yoga is the endless expanse—nobody ever “finishes” learning yoga; the psyche is the vast

interior that has no bottom yet is inherently workable. Both fields become more effective through the discoveries and language of the other. In the near future, I am going to launch an international, web-based resource and online education hub to integrate these fields worldwide. I plan to bring the material to Harvard and Wall Street within the next two years. The world is hungry for this food—what would you like to bring to the table?

I first arrived in the San Francisco Bay area in 1991. I was leaving my latest twisted shaman, fleeing from a Native American Sundance at a Hopi reservation in the high desert plains of Arizona. I had hitched a ride with a recently released Native American ex-con from San Quentin State Prison and his spiritual counselor, trying to find my way towards San Francisco to a one-of-a-kind-in-this-world graduate school I had heard of while at undergrad at the University of Michigan called The California Institute of Integral Studies. The first big workshop I attended was at the Herbst Theatre in Oakland, where authors and Buddhists Stephen and Ondrea Levine were teaching. They were the first of the many people I met in California who spoke the language of my soul and free spirit, and did so humbly, naturally, and in such a grounded and accessible way. The only thing I remember about that weekend—not even what they taught about—is their story about meeting in a rehab center: one was hitting their head on a rock while detoxing from meth, the other from heroin. “If we can come this far,” Stephen told the 300 people gathered, with the tone of conviction of one who has lived what he speaks of, “anyone can. Jesus and Buddha were just Joe and Mike down the street who had a dream and the courage to live it.”

I offer this first-ever academic volume on the subject of the integration of yoga and Western psychology in this same spirit as Stephen offered to me over 20 years ago. The field is big enough for all of us, and needs us each to contribute our gifts and insights. There is nobody whose perspective is not valued or important. Welcome to the fruits of mine and Gabriel’s shared labor over the past year, with a deep thanks to Cambridge Scholars Press for following the conference’s inception, and soliciting this volume based on the merit of the work presented. “*Ata yoganu asansam,*” begins Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*. “Now we begin again!” Whether we are engaging this material for the first time or the one-thousandth time, we always have the choice to begin freshly again, and to choose to participate in the evolution of a field that truly knows no bounds.

# INTRODUCTION

GABRIEL AXEL, MSc

THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF INTEGRAL STUDIES  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

This volume of the *Proceedings of the Yoga & Psyche Conference* features the proceedings of the “First International Yoga & Psyche Conference,” which was hosted by Mariana Caplan, PhD, MFT, at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco from April 18–20th, 2014. The conference drew together diverse international scholars and practitioners—academics, teachers, and mystics—interested in exploring the intersection of yoga and Western psychology. Although an academic discussion of both Eastern and Western models of the human mind began decades ago, we are now witnessing a critical confluence where Eastern thought and practice have become more widely assimilated into Western culture. Likewise, the complexities of modern life have demanded an appreciation by yoga practitioners of the invaluable mode of inquiry for skillful navigation of the psyche offered by Western psychology. This is an exciting time in the wider field of psychology, and clearly we are on the cusp of an emerging academic field.

As a teacher, student, and practitioner of both yoga and meditation, and with a background in neuroscience and cognition, I felt an immediate resonance with the vision of this international assembly and was inspired to both present my thoughts for the fusion of neuroscience and yoga and co-edit this volume with Caplan. Currently I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Newcastle, Australia, investigating the potential of meditation and yoga to improve motor recovery in stroke patients, and I believe that the exciting research presented at the conference suggests the tremendous potential for many more beneficial blendings of Western and Eastern practices and approaches. This volume invites the reader to digest the wisdom and knowledge presented and to participate in the collective project.

Yoga, broadly speaking, can be found in virtually all cultures as conscious attempts to enter non-ordinary states of consciousness, a phenomenon that is at its heart an expression of capacities innate to human beings. Yogic knowledge has entered mainstream culture and kindled a

fire with Western psychology in both professional practice and theory. Examples of this convergence include integrating basic yoga techniques (for example, postures, breath management, and mindfulness meditation) with various forms of psychotherapy (for example, somatic and trauma psychology), applying yoga and psychotherapy to psychological disorders (for example, depression and anxiety), and using neurophysiological models to describe yogic processes. The authors in this volume address a range of topics that serve as a springboard for broader investigation and consideration of yoga and Western psychology.

Neuroscience and trauma are two fields that have gained traction in the discussion of yoga and Western psychology and are shaping their application. The hard sciences such as neuroscience open the door for more precise explanations of yoga, but as evidenced in this volume, are in the very early stages of research. Trauma research has paved the way for exploring pertinent questions regarding how yoga and psychology can help individuals who have experienced trauma, for example, how the body might serve as an entryway to unlocking cycles of fear and self-protection that have hijacked the nervous system. The papers in this volume that address neuroscience and trauma are critical to a balanced research approach and lay the groundwork for further investigation.

A major theme at the conference was the use of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as the authoritative reference text for yogic principles and practices employed in the syncretic methods used or reported by the authors. Although Patanjali's Sutras present only one variation of yoga, the text expounds some key features of a general yogic landscape and ethos that are relevant to current thinking in Western psychology, such as layers of consciousness, mental imprints and shadow elements, liberation from suffering, examples of yogic abilities, and a set of principles that can be interpreted as applying to life, mind, body, and spirit. This volume embraces the Patanjali-centric discourse rather than focuses on the text's constraints, and the editors expect the developing field of yoga and psychology to discover even more points of intersection with yogic traditions and texts and to continue embracing a more precise representation of them.

Digging into these articles allowed me to probe the minds of the authors and understand their individual perspectives. The trends mentioned earlier surfaced not only from the presentations themselves but also through the process of peer review. As a volume editor, the challenge was deciding along which lines to unify and refine the papers into one cohesive narrative that reflected the spirit and intent of the yoga and psyche vision. There has been a whole lot of grace and grit, and Mariana

and I have been rewarded through what has become a very rich growth process professionally, personally, and interpersonally.

The papers presented progress from what is presently known and understood, to what is currently being explored, to the possibilities for future research. The papers also progress from applications of grosser concepts to explorations of subtler ones. Our hope is that each paper builds on the one preceding it to offer the reader new and deeper knowledge and the suggestion of future directions in the field.

The first paper in the volume is titled “Invocation” by Rama Jyoti Vernon. Vernon is an accomplished yoga teacher and a leading exemplar of integrating the yogic path with a humanitarian worldly life. A citizen diplomat, mother of five, teacher, and lecturer, Vernon has focused on international conflict resolution, leaving traces of yogic knowledge wherever she goes. Her paper serves as a blessing for the initiation of the joint field of yoga and psychology. She is quick to point out the perceived abyss that lies between yoga and Western psychology yet assures the reader that the two are aligned at their core and aim to free the fractured psyche. In this way, Vernon sets the tone and intention for the logical unpacking of the articles that follow.

This invocation is followed by Christopher Chapple’s piece titled “Establishing Yoga Studies.” Chapple, who holds a PhD in Theology, is an academic and scholar of Indian Yoga, Jainism, and Buddhism and has published over a dozen books on these subjects. He is the Director of the Master of Arts in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in California and is credited as being among the first to establish a master’s degree program in yoga studies. His paper offers insights into the process of creating this program and explains how it arose from within the general sociocultural context in the United States starting in the late 19th century into the 1960s and beyond. This paper offers inspiration for all academics in the joint field of yoga and psychology by showcasing the relevance of and potential for yoga studies in modern institutional scholarship.

The third paper in this volume is titled “Yoga Psychotherapy: The Integration of Western Psychological Theory and Ancient Yogic Wisdom,” by Mariana Caplan, PhD, MFT, and co-authors Adriana Portillo and Lysie Seely, both doctoral students in psychology at The California Institute of Integral Studies. Caplan is a seasoned yoga teacher and psychotherapist and the author of seven books in the fields of psychology and spirituality, including the forthcoming *Yoga & Psyche*. This paper is the crucial link in the chain of papers because it brings to light the various academic fields and topics relevant in the confluence of yoga and Western

psychology that will receive further treatment in the remaining volume. It reviews the literature on the intersection of yoga and psychology and discusses the relevance of somatic psychology; current research on the effects of yoga on stress, clinical diagnoses, and well-being; trauma research; and Caplan's signature Yoga & Psyche Method that draws from over two decades of experience as a clinical psychotherapist and yoga practitioner.

The next paper in the volume, titled "Integrating Yoga and Psychotherapy to Treat Depression: A Literature Review," is by Susan Robbins, MEd, MA. Robbins is an avid yoga practitioner and a certified counselor in Ottawa, Canada, whose private practice integrates various therapeutic approaches. In her paper, she analyzes the current literature on yoga and depression and offers critical remarks for improving the quality of the research. She draws on keen observations from her own practice to emphasize the benefits of yoga for encouraging presence within the body, as compared with practicing mindfulness alone. And perhaps most importantly, Robbins offers experienced guidance to psychotherapists desiring to implement yoga as adjunct treatments for their clients. Robbins' paper summarizes many of the initial questions that psychotherapists might have regarding uniting yoga and psychology in a professional setting.

Also addressing the application of yoga in clinical diagnoses, authors Kate Morrissey Stahl, MA, and Chad Drake, PhD, discuss adding yoga to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), their specialty, for the treatment of anxiety. Stahl, lead author on the paper, specializes in clinical mindfulness-based interventions and is currently a doctoral candidate in Human Development and Family Sciences. Drake is an assistant professor in clinical psychology, with a focus on contextual behavioral science. The paper summarizes how ACT is traditionally implemented and justifies combining it with yoga as a joint mindfulness-based intervention. The authors dissect an example of how yoga might be implemented with a psychotherapeutic method for research purposes and explore some of the potential issues that might arise with such an implementation.

Kelli Grock's paper, "Conceptualizing the Union of the Twelve-Step Philosophy with Yoga," extends to chemical dependency diagnoses the implications of applying yoga to depression and anxiety diagnoses. Grock, who is a licensed substance abuse counselor and also a dedicated yoga practitioner and instructor, draws insightful parallels between the popular paradigm of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Patanjali's eightfold path. Taking the reader through a conceptual overview of the Twelve Steps in AA, Grock proposes that the practice of yoga can work to promote balance and coping skills in the lives of patients suffering from addiction. She



invites the reader to expand his or her thinking regarding the possible applications of yoga and psychotherapy in contemporary settings.

The next paper, by Joann Lutz, MSW, entitled “Classical Yoga Postures as Psychotherapeutic Intervention for Autonomic Nervous System Regulation,” moves into new territory in the volume by providing an overview of how general autonomic nervous system regulation is affected by the practice of yoga postures. Lutz, a psychotherapist with extensive experience and expertise in applying trauma-informed and nervous system-informed yoga in the context of social work, expounds on the intersection of yoga, somatic experiencing, trauma, and neurophysiology by relating them to the effects of yoga asana on the regulation and dysregulation of broad states of the autonomic nervous system. Lutz describes how mental health professionals and yoga instructors can begin integrating these elements into their practice.

Anita Claney, MSc, a yoga therapist specializing in trauma and veterans, and her coauthors Gina Siler, MA, and Kausthub Desikachar, PhD, extend Lutz’s therapeutic ideas a bit further in the treatment of trauma in their paper, “Clinical Synergism in the Treatment of Trauma: Yoga Therapy and Psychotherapy.” They paint a more complex picture, using a treatment approach that integrates yoga asana with psychotherapy, somatic therapy, and mindfulness. Claney draws extensive links between yoga philosophy and trauma, employing Sanskrit terms to label various aspects of trauma-related psychology. Such an effort helps to map correlations between concepts in yoga and trauma psychology, and Claney describes two case studies that illustrate these principles.

Building on the complex psychology of trauma, Aparna Ramaswamy, PhD, a psychotherapist and lifetime practitioner of natya yoga, brings us back into the body with classical Indian dance (Skt. *natya*) in her paper titled “Integrative Yoga Therapy to Relieve Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety, and Bipolar Disorder.” Ramaswamy offers a wellspring of healing with her integrated Natya Yoga Therapy (NYT), which fuses the delights of *natya* with yoga and psychotherapy to empower an individual and promote embodiment. She describes NYT using theory and case studies, resulting in an elegant exposition of a multidimensional therapeutic approach.

Inviting the reader to explore the more subtle aspects of yoga and therapy is the paper by Silvia Nakkach, MA, entitled “Sound and the Subtle: Transforming Consciousness and Emotions Through Mantra and Raga Yoga.” Nakkach is an award-winning composer and director of the Vox Mundi School of Sound and Voice based in San Francisco and Rio de Janeiro. She offers a vibrant and detailed description of the intricate workings of subtle

sound in mantra and melody (Skt. *raga*), explaining how the alchemical potency of various levels of sound can alleviate the psyche from suffering and lead to deeper healing and transformation. She fuses high art with advanced yogic principles to enrich the psychotherapeutic encounter.

Nakkach's exploration of the subtle leads the reader to the final paper in this volume by Stuart Sovatsky, PhD, MFT, titled "Euro-Hinduism in America." Sovatsky is a Princeton scholar, California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) graduate, and tantra yoga scholar and practitioner who specializes in relationship counseling and training therapists. His diverse work ranges from teaching yoga in juvenile prisons to transforming troubled marriages. In his paper, he offers a narrative of how the first five percent of Indo-Tibetan archival wisdom was assimilated into the United States. He explains the course of yoga's penetration into the West, from yoga and meditation to Gandhian nonviolent change and holistic health practices. This paper is a fitting culmination to the volume because it suggests that through an ongoing and deepening immersion into the heart of yoga both individually and collectively, subtler layers of yogic wisdom will continue to reveal themselves and merge with the Western psyche. This piecemeal unraveling will continually generate new directions for further study.

As you read and reflect on the presentations in this volume, consider how the ideas and practices described might inform your own professional and personal work, growth, and study. The editors encourage readers to submit to subsequent volumes and participate in the conferences. These experiences bring together the wider community of players in this field and provide an opportunity for idea exchange and cross-pollination. Topics within this emerging field of yoga and Western psychology that the editors would like to see represented in future volumes and conferences include but are not limited to the following: evidence-based and quantitative research findings; case studies applying well-designed integrative approaches; an expansion into various yogic philosophies and aspects of yogic experience; the relationship between Western psychological approaches and a variety of yogic texts and traditions; integral approaches that might include societal, cultural, and sociopolitical influences; contributions from psychiatry and other areas of medicine; neuroscience-based research; and findings from clinical interventions and integrative programs for well-being.

The editors and contributors of this volume offer the reader a string of works, a garland, that represents only the beginning of this emerging field. This offering is an invitation to learn, contemplate, and participate in this new field—in essence, to add more beads to the string, to create something new, with infinite possibility, together.

# INVOCATION

## RAMA JYOTI VERNON

tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe-'vasthānam ||3||

For finding our true self (drashtu) entails insight into our own nature.

—Patanjali, *Yoga Sūtras*: Samadhi Pada<sup>1</sup>

Yoga. A perennial Eastern-originated science. Its name means “union” in Sanskrit, and putting its techniques into practice unites the mind, body, and spirit.

Psychology. A modern day Western science that studies the physiological and biological processes that underlie cognitive behaviors in order to understand and explain the functions of the mind.

Two schools of thought. One ancient. One in relative infancy. Both with the ability to bring up layers of impressions from latent depths of the psyche so they can be seen, processed, and ultimately released. The more we advance in modern psychology, the more we are finding that it parallels, supports—and really goes hand-in-hand with—the ancient yogic teachings. The experiential outgrowth of these two powerful practices combined provides practitioners of any school of thought with a more complete picture to access and transform the psyche.<sup>2</sup>

A yogin is one who accelerates the process of their personal evolution by using ancient transformative practices to unearth unconscious impressions from deep in the psyche. In this way, the yogi is a living bridge between Eastern and Western thought. Many of these practices are described in the Eight Limbs, which can be found in the *Yoga Sūtras of Patanjali*.<sup>3</sup> Each limb of practice relates to an aspect of living a healthy

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<sup>1</sup>Steiner, Ronald. Retrieved from <http://www.ashtangayoga.info/source-texts/yoga-sutra-patanjali/chapter-1/item/tada-drashtuh-svarupe-vasthanam-3/>

<sup>2</sup>The basic meaning of the Greek word psyche (ψυχή or *psūkhē*) was “life” in the sense of “breath,” and formed from the verb ψύχω or *psukhō* (“to blow”). Derived meanings included “spirit,” “soul,” “ghost,” and ultimately “self” in the sense of “conscious personality” or “psyche.”

<sup>3</sup> *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* are 196 Indian sūtras that constitute the foundational text of Ashtanga Yoga, also called Raja Yoga. See an exposition by

and fulfilling life. These practices go far beyond the physical postures, or *asanas*, to include breathing practices, meditation, and more.

The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* comprise a great treatise on yoga. They transcend time, can unite East and West (given the appropriate treatment), and remain one of the deepest forms of psychology in the world of today. The second sutra, “*yoga chitta vritti nirodhah*,” means “to still or quiet the impulses that arise in the field of the mind.” Studying the *Yoga Sutras* gives extraordinary and complex insights into the human mind and reveals many distinct parallels to Western scientific views. For example, let’s examine the similarities between the enteric nervous system and the yogic concepts of *nadis*.

The enteric nervous system has its own unique characteristics compared to our autonomic nervous system, and it is sometimes referred to as the “second brain” or the “abdominal brain.” Scientists are examining the fascinating complexities of the enteric nervous system’s function and chemistry for deeper insight into the relationships between mind, emotions, and the physical body. Specifically relevant is the chemical exchange of “information molecules.” These neurotransmitters leap between neurons, triggering a chemical change that activates a cascade of new electrical impulses. *Nadis* are physically invisible channels that carry the energies of the subtle body. They are interdependent with the gross nervous system; they function on a different level and there is influence between the former and latter. *Nadis* correlate physically to the nervous system in the same way that *chakras* correlate to the endocrine system. Today, our mental and behavioral patterns are increasingly giving deeper insight into the nature and function of mind and body. Sigmund Freud held that when a desire remains unfulfilled, it becomes a craving. A craving produces tension in the mind and body. When we seek to fulfill a craving, it’s fueled more by the desire to ease that tension than by attaining the original object of desire. Soon we will have another desire and the cycle repeats. This is how we get trapped in the mental patterns that psychotherapy aims to uncover and alleviate.

A similar cause and effect cycle is explained in the *Yoga Sutras*. First, a mind wave arises from the unconscious mind, giving rise to a desire impulse that Patanjali defines as *vritti*. Desire leads to an action. And action leads to an experience that produces a positive or negative impression—a *samskara*, or scar—in the psyche. These impressions lead to new mind waves and the cycle repeats. Repeating an action creates a

mind groove. These mind grooves are the repetitive patterns we fall into. It is the aim of yoga practice and psychotherapy to bring these patterns to light where they can be removed.

Sutra commentaries state that the invisible must become visible before it can be eradicated or transformed. Both yoga and Western psychology facilitate this transformation by calling on active introspection, so we discover for ourselves the answers that have been inside all along. Yogic techniques like asana, breathing, and meditation guide us inward in the same way that a good therapist will ask questions that guide us inward. In this way, yoga serves a parallel function to talk therapy in bringing stored emotions to the conscious mind where they can be recognized and worked with. Western psychology helps individuals to elucidate and adaptively own previously unseen maladaptive habits of or unhealthy patterns in the psyche, or shadow elements. The goal of both yoga and psychology is to produce a state of balance and equanimity in the physical, subtle, mental, emotional, and spiritual sheaths of our vessel. In both, we're never given more than we can handle in the given moment.

While Eastern psychology sees no separation of body and mind, Western studies of the mind have gravitated towards more partitioned analyses of psychological patterns, stages, and qualities, and a growing interest in the physical brain. Modern neuroscience is now drawing parallels on the gross level with what Eastern philosophy has known all along: that yoga and meditation practices transform the psyche; they can actually beneficially alter the physical brain.<sup>4</sup>

Every time an experience occurs, neuronal connections are shaped. In patterns of repetition, neural pathways representative of that experience are strengthened in the brain and throughout the body. Consistent yoga asana practice can help to decrease one's identification with ephemeral sensations, pain, and fear. As a result, one becomes more capable of seeing those sensations for what they are and will not respond as strongly to them. One can allow painful experiences to rise and fall without becoming ensnared in the story.<sup>5</sup> Practitioners often feel the benefits from this decreased stress and anxiety at a fine bio-energetic level. Likewise, Western psychology has developed methods in various modes of

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<sup>4</sup> It is now understood that Eastern practices of yoga and meditation lead demonstrably to highly disciplined minds that neuroscientists can fruitfully study. <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/neuroscientists-dalai-lama-swap-insights-meditation/>

<sup>5</sup> Gladding, Rebecca. (May 22, 2013). *This is Your Brain on Meditation*. Retrieved on March 23, 2015 from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/use-your-mind-change-your-brain/201305/is-your-brain-meditation>

psychotherapy that help clients to more correctly and beneficially interpret their experiences, resulting in greater psychological integration. The *Yoga Sutras* say that we are the architects of our own destiny. It's also a common catchphrase in the West that we "create our own reality." More and more physical correlations of this claim are appearing every day as neuroscience has been shedding light on this in recent years.

As we move forward in science, we must remember to look back to the time-tested yogic texts and practices. Modern neuropsychology is constantly making new discoveries that provide biological correlates for concepts the ancients discovered phenomenologically. Merging ancient Eastern wisdom with modern advancements in psychology leads us into a graceful and harmonious balance where the light of Spirit will fill our vessel with insights, develop our intuitive capacities, transform intellect into wisdom, and transform the way we respond to all of life.

### **Author Biography**

Rama Jyoti Vernon is an internationally acclaimed yoga instructor and peace mediator, lecturer in Asian philosophy and East-West psychology, and author of *Yoga: The Practice of Myth and Sacred Geometry*. She co-designed a Conflict Resolution Training Program with Rev. Max Lafser using principles of East-West psychology, integral yoga, and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as a basis for non-violence training that is used in churches, community organizations, and yoga institutions internationally. Rama founded five non-profit organizations, and is co-founder of *Yoga Journal*. Her extraordinary knowledge has shaped the foundation of contemporary yoga. She has trained yoga teachers for 45 years, and continues to work with teachers worldwide to integrate yogic practices into daily life. She was awarded Outstanding Achievement Awards from the governments of Costa Rica, India, and the former USSR. A testimony of integral yoga, Rama is a mother of five and a grandmother of twelve.

# ESTABLISHING YOGA STUDIES

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## **Abstract**

The academic study of yoga has traditionally been found within departments of area studies, religious studies, philosophy, or philology. This paper describes a new approach to yoga studies as a stand-alone discipline. With the rise of interest in the practice of yoga in the 1990s, questions began to arise: Where did yoga originate? What is the relationship between yoga and spirituality? What texts and ideas are central to yoga? The Center for Religion and Spirituality at Loyola Marymount University initiated certificate programs in Yoga Philosophy, Yoga Therapy, and related fields in response to this need, starting in 2002. Due to the strong enrollments, LMU suggested establishing a graduate degree in Yoga Studies. The first class began in fall 2013, pursuing the following course of study: three semesters of Sanskrit language and literature (Bhagavad Gita and Yoga Sutra); three courses on the physical and physiological aspects of yoga; six courses on yoga and spirituality, including classes on Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism (in India), and Comparative Mysticism; and a comprehensive exam and final research project. By raising the level of education for yoga teachers, the university system stands poised to be of service to a new generation of emerging healers and thought leaders.

In the fall of 2013, Loyola Marymount University initiated the first Master of Arts in Yoga Studies degree program in North America. Though many scientific studies have been conducted during the past several years on the effects of yoga, academic involvement with this emerging discipline had hitherto been confined to largely textual and historical studies within departments of religious studies and philosophy. In contradistinction, the LMU Master of Arts in Yoga Studies requires three parallel areas of study, offering a comprehensive immersion in this

complex tradition: Sanskrit grammar and reading the Bhagavad Gita and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* in the original Sanskrit language; philosophical and theological studies; and physiological and therapeutic aspects of yoga practice. This chapter will describe the conceptualization and implementation of this program.

Yoga first entered the American consciousness during the 19th century, at a time when the first translations of such texts as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita were published. The New England Transcendentalists, including Emerson and Thoreau, wrote glowingly of Indian thought. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) spoke at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, electrifying his audience with his message of universal truth. He subsequently founded Vedanta Societies throughout North America, including centers in New York, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. Though he died less than ten years later, his work was carried on by several disciples. The author Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986) collaborated with Swami Prabhavananda (1893–1976) to publish versions of the *Yoga Sutras*, the Bhagavad Gita, and other texts that helped extend public knowledge of yoga in the 1950s and 1960s. Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952) arrived in America in 1920 and taught largely in Los Angeles, establishing several meditation centers in southern California. He also developed a series of progressive correspondence courses. American immigration law implemented in 1920 prohibited Asians from settling in the United States. This legislation remained in place until 1965, at which time the sentiment of the Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr., swept away this racist exclusionary policy.

The mid-1960s brought about many cultural changes in the United States. Numerous yoga teachers from India settled in America, with many more to follow. Organizations for meditation and yoga practice were established in nearly every American city, including the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers, branches of the Himalayan Institute, and 3HO Kundalini Yoga Centers, to name a few. Simultaneously, the academic study of religion received a great boost through the work of Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), who established the History of Religions program at the University of Chicago Divinity School and encouraged the study of Asian classical languages. Venerable Oriental studies programs at the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard University, Yale, Columbia, the University of California at Berkeley and elsewhere began to attract students of Sanskrit and Asian thought. New programs took shape at Fordham University, Temple University, the University of Iowa, and the University of California at Santa Barbara offering textual, philosophical, theological,



and field studies about and in India, supported through repayment of wheat loaned during times of famine in 1950s India. Instead of sending rupees to the United States, the Indian government sent books to university libraries in the United States and supported American students learning in India.

Physical forms of yoga gained popularity in the United States through the work of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers established by Swami Vishnudevananda and others in the 1960s and, at a later time, yoga asana as taught by disciples of Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888–1989), including Krishnamacharya's son Desikachar, Patabhi Jois, Indra Devi, and B. K. S. Iyengar. By the 1990s yoga had reached an unparalleled popularity in North America. According to *Yoga Journal*, more than 20 million Americans practiced yoga in 2014. Unlike the Chinese discipline of acupuncture, yoga did not establish a system of licensure but opted for a loose guild-like federation of training centers operating under registration guidelines developed by Yoga Alliance, a non-profit organization established in the late 1990s. Its 200-hour training requirements have determined the foundational training for teachers offered at many yoga studios worldwide.

Some of the students who adopted the practice of yoga in the 1960s and 1970s combined their personal commitment to yoga with their academic studies. For instance, Professor Frederick Smith (PhD, University of Pennsylvania), who teaches Sanskrit and religions of India at the University of Iowa, studied under B. K. S. Iyengar while engaged in the study of Sanskrit at Savitribai Phule Pune University.

As founder of the Master of Arts in Yoga Studies, my own narrative will help give some background to the development of the program. I began the practice of yoga while in high school in upstate New York in 1970, having earlier begun the practice of Zen sitting as taught by Philip Kapleau in his book *The Three Pillars of Zen*.

During my first semester of college in 1972 at the State University of New York at Buffalo, I enrolled in a four-unit class on the Bhagavad Gita taught by disciples of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada during which we chanted the Sanskrit verses and heard homilies inspired by Prabhupada's teachings.

During that same semester I was introduced through a classmate in my introductory philosophy class to Yoga Anand Ashram in Amityville, New York. Founded by a woman later known as Gurani Anjali (née Anjali Inti, 1935–2001) and located in a former hayloft on Merrick Road, it offered weekly classes and a Sunday meditation service. Grounded in the teachings of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, it struck me as intellectually complex and spiritually grounded. I

transferred to the State University of New York at Stony Brook, 450 miles away from home, and commuted regularly between my rented room near the university and the ashram, 25 miles to the southwest. The ashram was dedicated in 1972.

One year prior, Stony Brook welcomed The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions to the fifth floor of its library. Staff at the Institute included Dr. Richard A. Gard, one of the first American scholars of Buddhism; Drs. Robert A. F. Thurman and Christopher S. George, who studied first with Richard Alpert and Timothy Leary at Harvard before apprenticing with Tibetan scholar Geshe Wangyal in Freehold Acres, New Jersey, and later receiving their advanced degrees from Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania; and librarian Hannah G. Robinson, who had studied Tibetan at the School for Oriental and African Studies in London, where she met her husband, Richard Robinson, who established the Buddhist Studies programs at the Universities of Toronto and Wisconsin.

While still in my teens, and in the midst of these remarkable scholars, I took up the study of Sanskrit grammar and classical Tibetan, reading many chapters of the Bhagavad Gita, in my senior year in Sanskrit, and many chapters of the *Bodhicaryavatara* in Tibetan and Sanskrit. I completed a double major in comparative literature and philosophy and weighed various offers for graduate study from the University of Wisconsin, University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University. However, Fordham University offered the most enticing curriculum, a mix of Sanskrit studies with theological reflection, including a course titled the Theology of Parapsychology. Thomas Berry taught wide-ranging courses on the history of religions; Anne Feldhaus offered courses in archival and field methodologies; George Elder approached Buddhist studies through a Jungian prism; Jose Pereira taught what he called the Rose Window of Hindu Theologies from Sanskrit texts in the original and Sufism; John Chethimattam, who served as my dissertation mentor, conducted private Sanskrit tutorials and regularly taught Indian theories of consciousness in the philosophy department. He was one of the co-founders of Dharmaram Seminary in Bangalore whose undergraduate division, Christ University, has become one of the top-rated institutions of higher learning in India.

Meanwhile, through these three years of undergraduate education on Long Island and four years of graduate school in the Bronx, my wife and I, who had married in 1974, deepened our involvement in the ashram, participating in the opening of a restaurant and an art gallery, as well as serving as co-managers of a spiritual bookstore and community education center. Gene Kelly, a classmate at both Stony Brook and Fordham, became assistant director of the ashram and began teaching courses that brought

our university studies to the broader ashram population on the south shore of Long Island. For nearly a full year we studied the *Samkhya Karika*, poring over Gerald Larson's translation in the late 1970s, verse by verse. In 1980 we began a seven-year study of the *Yoga Sutras*, rendering the grammar for each sutra, reading the available translations, and examining the Vyasa commentary in the original Sanskrit and in translation. This project eventually yielded a book published in India in 1990.

After receiving the PhD in 1980, the institute offered me full-time work as assistant director and Stony Brook offered for me to teach as many as two courses per semester. For five years I taught Sanskrit each semester, as well as courses on yoga philosophy, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. I also organized three academic conferences, the first on Samkhya and yoga, the second on science and religious experience, and the third on nonviolence in the world's religions. At Moksha Community Education Center I offered courses on poetry, the Bhagavad Gita, and other topics, and organized various lecture series on philosophical topics as well as on holistic health with invited speakers from the New York metropolitan region.

Tenure track positions were rare in the New York area in the 1980s. After passing on a position in western Pennsylvania, and a few days after the birth of our first child in 1985, I accepted an offer to move to Los Angeles. Less than ten years earlier, Loyola University merged with Marymount College to form Loyola Marymount University, located on a bluff overlooking the ocean. My duties included teaching all non-Christian religions, in accord with the proclamation made by the Catholic Church in the 1960s that truth can be found in all religions. In comparison with New York, California proved to be more tolerant of diversity and more open to innovation. After developing a comprehensive curriculum in the study of the world's religions, and learning about the various avenues for opportunity within the university, I began organizing community lectures on Indian thought, inviting colleagues from India and elsewhere to our campus.

By the mid-nineties, yoga had come into ascendancy, with the establishment of Yoga Works by Maty Ezraty and Chuck Miller, Ana Forrest Yoga Academy in nearby Santa Monica, and regular visits to Los Angeles by B. K. S. Iyengar, Desikachar, and others. Carol Rossi, who had recently completed a master's thesis in World Arts and Cultures at UCLA on the self-reporting of feelings after participation in yoga class, suggested that with the deep interest in our community in learning more about yoga, we form a consistent study group. Beginning in 1996 and continuing for five years, we met every three weeks at our nearby home, starting when

our son and daughter were in bed at 8:00 p.m. Disciples of Swami Chidvilasananda and of Swami Lakshmanjoo, followers of Sivananda yoga and Iyengar yoga, members of the Vedanta Society, a sociologist and anthropologist couple who had learned yoga in India, a classicist, a movie actress, several full time yoga teachers, and numerous LMU students would gather in our living room. Starting at the beginning of the *Yoga Sutras*, we would chant and discuss one aphorism, sometimes two. In the late 1990s, a proposal was submitted to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts suggesting the establishment of a Master of Arts in Yoga Studies that met a less than enthusiastic reception.

Our study of the *Yoga Sutras* concluded within days of the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The deep questioning into which the world was thrust at this difficult time prompted me to return to a new dean and ask that the establishment of a degree program be considered, thinking that the yoga and Gandhian skills of nonviolence and speaking truth to power could be invaluable for the 21st century. Our experience with the popularity of yoga in the 1990s had also shown a deep cultural craving for modalities through which to connect with the body and the senses. This time the dean did not say no, but suggested an alternative. Beginning in the 1950s, the university has offered continuing education courses for professional development that can culminate with a certificate. The Martin Gang Institute for Intergroup Relationships had been training civil servants in Los Angeles since the Watts Riots of 1967 about the joys and challenges of working in multicultural contexts. The Center for Pastoral Studies, by then known as the Center for Religion and Spirituality, had been training church workers in such areas as parish administration and Bible study leadership since the early nineties, responding to the need for a theologically educated lay populace who have taken on many duties formerly assumed by priests, brothers, and members of women's religious orders. These certificates, and many others, continue to be open to all learners, regardless of educational history, and often provide a gateway to further studies. Thousands participate in these trainings each year, and each year LMU issues hundreds of certificates of completion in a variety of fields. Currently, several of the certificates are taught exclusively in Spanish.

With this model in mind, a proposal to implement a 120-hour training in yoga philosophy was born. Carol Rossi, who for nine years taught undergraduate students yoga through the dance department, served as coordinator for this program, organizing class times and promotion of the program throughout the growing southern California community of yoga teachers and students. Several faculty members were recruited to teach in

the program, including Dr. John Casey (PhD, University of Hawaii), John Hughes (fifteen years of residential training in Kashmir Shaivism with Swami Lakshmanjoo), myself, and many others. As many as 25 students joined the required classes in the *Yoga Sutras*, Sanskrit language, the Bhagavad Gita, the *Samkhya Karika*, the Upanishads, and the variety of electives that were offered, and continue to be offered, increasingly online. David Hurwitz, who had attended a *Yoga Sutras* study session conducted on Pioneer Boulevard in Los Angeles' Little India, invited me to a workshop by Srivatsa Ramaswami, the senior-most non-related disciple of Krishnamacharya who taught yoga to classical Indian dancers in Madras for 30 years under Krishnamacharya's supervision. We invited Ramaswami to initiate a new certificate program, which has grown into an annual 200-hour teacher training.

Dr. Larry Payne, who had coached my wife in a back-friendly yoga practice, shared that his yoga work at UCLA medical school, where I had guest-lectured, was drawing to a close. We discussed creating a certificate in Yoga Therapy Rx, which now has grown to a four-year course of study, meeting one weekend per month. The fourth level certificate brings yoga therapy to the underserved for six private, supervised sessions at Venice Family Clinic, with amazing results. Dr. Eden Goldman and Terra Gold offer a comprehensive 200-hour training in Yoga and the Health Sciences that serves as a gateway for the Yoga Therapy certificates. The Yoga and Ecology certificate (2004) was rebooted in 2014 as Yoga, Mindfulness, and Social Change, a 100-hour weekend program through which students learn about the application of yoga and meditation in light of ecology, trauma, incarceration, and other pressing concerns. Other certificates are being considered, such as the training of schoolteachers who seek to integrate the benefits of yoga into the classroom, and the study of Ayurvedic principles of self-care.

In 2008, with hundreds of LMU certificates having been awarded in various aspects of yoga, the university administration approached me with what for them was a novel idea: "How about starting a graduate program in yoga studies?" With a twinkle in my eye, I said, "Yes, what a great idea!" and the long approval process began. Some years earlier as chair of the Department of Theological Studies, I helped merge the former graduate program in Pastoral Studies with the undergraduate program in Theology and birth two ongoing MA degrees, Theology (with various emphases including Comparative Theology and Spiritual Direction) and Pastoral Theology. The former degree serves largely high school teachers and those seeking to enter doctoral studies; the latter helps train pastoral associates and directors of religious education at parishes. Many students

enter the graduate programs in Theological Studies through continuing education courses. Being familiar with the program proposal process, I approached the various committees in charge of new program proposals. With appreciation university-wide of continuing education as a gateway to graduate studies, the path opened for the creation of a proposal to initiate a new Master of Arts in Yoga Studies.

Without relaying too many details, the process of administrative approval required the drafting of a proposal that was then reviewed by departmental, college, and university committees, with improvements suggested and implemented at nearly every step. It was decided to implement a cohort model, where students enter the program at the same time, follow the same curriculum, learn together and from one another, bond as a group, and graduate as a group. This approach builds a strong sense of community and allows for certainty in the budget planning process.

Through surveys conducted it was determined that Monday and Wednesday afternoons would work best for scheduling classes. The units required (42 across the equivalent of 14 classes) brings the curriculum in accord with national accreditation standards set by the Association of Theological Schools. Comparison schools consulted as part of the proposal process were S-VYASA Prashanti Vivekananda Kendra, associated with Bangalore University, and Somaiya University in Mumbai. Three tracks of parallel studies emerged requiring three semesters of Sanskrit language, three semesters on the physical aspects of yoga, and five courses in the philosophy and spirituality of yoga including summer study abroad in India. Students also complete a foundations course on entry, choose from the extension certificate offerings for an elective field, and complete a comprehensive examination and a final project.

The faculty for the program includes a senior LMU professor, a second full-time professor, and three to four part time professors. Several foundations have made grants for student support and activities. Special events such as lectures, concerts, and conferences are held each year. Special curricular and extra-curricular offerings include the group study of Jaina yoga in India each summer and student participation in community outreach programs. In fall of 2014 a group of first-year students organized a yoga training for inmates at the Lynwood Women's Detention Facility, and in the spring of 2015 a group of second-year students are planning to teach yoga to various populations at Covenant House, a transitional living facility for young adults in New York City.