

Buddhism & yoga, the intimate relations¹

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A note on methodology

This and other recent work expressly draws on a declarative ensemble of advanced study disciplines that represent an imminent ascetic arts tendency. It serially combines a range of departures that spring from a diversity of discursive fields including history, poetry, transcultural studies, Indology, comparative religion, social anthropology, ethnography, rhetoric, fine arts and nuagisme, et al; but in amalgamation with a transferred sense of the scientific method that mirrors at once both pratyaharic² and middle-way strategies intent on sustaining a posed neutrality in regard to its separated object field (gocara) – hence being in effect a passive transmitter of freely given data. I also apply the ancient pan-Indian Four Yogas matrix as an expedient model for data filtration, formulation and appraisal. The categorization of this four-fold criterion comprises karma, bhakti, jnana and raja yogas. The implementation of this analytic standard obliges very well-argued justifications as the gauging paradigm confronts dilemmas of suspended inconsistencies and interpretive divergences forming at the interface of normative principles and the more iconoclastic, futuristic and artistic proclivities obliging thus the skilful interweaving of conflict and harmony, old and new. With regard to transculturalism, I track James Elkins (2007) and propose that our practice effects richer meaning 'when we take not only our subject matter but our interpretive methodologies from the cultures that we study.' Post-modern thought plays a role all the same by providing us crucial analytical tools. Complicit to these are the hermeneutic strategies of deconstruction, defamiliarization, dissidence and suspicion.

² Pratyahara (Sanskrit): The freeing of awareness from the separated field of perceptible sense objects.

With the Buddhistic doctrine the Yoga was connected from the beginning, because it was the way by which The Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, had found Deliverance.

Professor Erich Frauwallner

1. The early purge of yoga

Is there any statement ascribed to the historical Buddha, Gautama, in direct regard to yoga? In verse 282 of Dhammapada, it states as follows. Yoga ve jayati bhuri: ayoga bhurisankhayo. "Spiritual yoga leads to light: lack of yoga to darkness" (trans. Mascaro, 1973: 75).³ One could hardly wish for a more striking statement. Yoga is something that leads to light, while ayoga, that is, absence of yoga leads to darkness. The dilemma, however, is that no serious scholar would regard Dhammapada as the "Buddha's true utterance" (Pali, Buddha vacana). Dhammapada is a singular text that counts as a part of what is known as the Pali Canon, itself a massive body of Pali language literature that constitutes the oldest surviving Buddhist writings (apart from the fragmentary Gandharan texts⁴) and claims to be Buddha vacana. When I first began a study the Pali literature I was shocked by an early misperception I developed that led me to believe that the early editors had meticulously eliminated yoga from the entire corpus scriptus. This particularly awed me in light of the fact that the far older Vedic-Sanskrit heritage, the language that Pali in large derives from, attributes no less than seventeen meanings to the single term

³ The Dhammapada. Translation and commentary by J. Mascaro, 1973: 75.

⁴ The Gandharan Buddhist Texts are the oldest extant Buddhist manuscripts yet discovered. These mid-first-to-second century texts are in five different collections. Most are in Gandhari language but written with the Kharosthi script (derived from the Aramaic alphabet) on birch bark. They were preserved in clay jars. A lesser portion of the Gandhari texts are written on palm leaf or vellum using the Brahmi script, and a smaller amount still in Gandhari Prakrit and Sanskrit languages. See R. Salomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhara*, 1999.

"yoga." I was quite mistrustful. It seemed to me as if the Pali editors had embarked upon a painstaking hunt for "yoga" and every time that four-letter word popped up ...delete, delete, delete. I was ready to accuse the ancient Pali editors of carrying out the perfect yoga-ectomy. But why? Why should they have wanted to eradicate yoga? But in any event, that wasn't the case; my hastily formed hypothesis was wrong.

Some years later with superior research tools, I revisited my sources and performed a far more thorough and refined investigation. There are nearly 100 different senses of "yoga" (as derived from Vedic root yuj) found in the Pali canon; around 33 varied meanings of yoga as a singular word,⁵ plus more than 60 implications when yoga appears in word combinations.⁶ Of related interest, the Sanskrit dictionary (Monier-Williams) yields three doctrinal Bauddha referencing terms that incorporate yoga.

1. Prayogavirya: energy in practice (one of the 3 energies).
2. Visamyoga: liberation from worldly fetters, disjunction, separation, omission.
3. Yogacara: the observance of the yajna; yajna yoga; the name of a work; a yogin (yogi); a follower of the Yogacara Buddhist sect or school, in plural, the disciples of that school.

To say the least, my opinion was reversed.

It is important, however, that we grant a little leeway and take into account that in the days of the Buddha the Vedic word "yoga" may likely have possessed a considerable range of alternate meanings. Notwithstanding, from a modern perspective we are entirely justified in claiming that the Buddha's whole life revolved around yoga. Yoga shaped his earliest ascetic training and led him to study with two

⁵ See Appendix I: Forty-two Sanskrit definitions of "yoga," below.

⁶ See Appendix II: Sixty-three Pali words containing "yoga," below

widely venerated Yoga Theras, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputra.⁷ The Buddha gained enlightenment by the means of yoga then taught it both publicly and privately to all of his disciples. His life was the main demonstration of his yoga.

2. The misperception of yoga in Buddhism

In light of these facts it seems quite strange that the "Buddhist" heritage bequeathed to us today nearly always views yoga disparagingly. At best it is regarded as a negligible pursuit that fosters physical and mental health. At worst it is deemed as a debasing form of self-mortification and spurned as a treacherous heretical practice. One finds such an ethos deeply engrained in nearly every strain of Buddhist sub-culture; and particularly so among the Theravada grouping. But of all the nations that claim Theravada, the Sinhalese excel in their propensity to isolate, denounce and entirely do away with the sentiment, technology and history of yoga. Indeed the modern-day Sri Lankans represent the height of this clearly global misrepresentation. But it is likely not them who gave birth to these distortions.

Why are there so many biased views against yoga? What are the origins of these falsifications? Might they signify fallouts from the days of the Buddha, or perhaps even centuries prior to his birth? What documents or texts might we possibly consult in our wish to comprehend the symptomatic set of counter-indications attached to yoga's misperception in what we blindly and obsessively refer to as "Buddhism"?

I suggest these polemics emerged from a fifth-to-fourth century BCE, from the Brahmano-phobic idea-fix that arose in the area known today as India. This

⁷ According to preliminary and inconclusive research, I have found but two instances in all of Gautama's dialogues where the Pali term *thera* (elder) is invoked. These are both in reference to the Buddha's two 'venerable' yoga masters, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputra.

historicized quarrel was later exported and – for rhetorical purposes – evoked by anti-Dravidian Sinhalese who if not egged on by fascist insistence, were goaded with fear and in want to engineer a heightened and continual state of cultural, political and ethnic strife between themselves and contending monarchs across the narrow Palk Strait.

I refer to an early philosophical period some one hundred and thirty-seven years postdating a time suggested by scholars as a quasi-consensual point in time that effectively marks Gautama's death. A serious doctrinal dispute arose in regard to a novel interpretation of a central but elusive Buddhist theory that a stalwart orthodoxy vigorously opposed and widely condemned as heretical. At issue in this vigorous clash of dogmas was the stunning appearance of a pudgalavada or "personalist theory," which early sources indicate developed among the Vatsiputriyas, the early third-century BCE "mother school" of a subsequent number of five Pudgalavadin or "Personalists" sub-schools.⁸

The major contribution of the Pudgalavada or Personalist school was its recognition that whatever constituted the "human being" as an "individual or person" (pudgala), it was something "neither permanent nor impermanent, neither relative nor absolute,"⁹ but something regarded instead as ineffable. What was the Pudgalavadin motive or motives in affirming their thesis of "the person existing *in principle*"? It was firstly an attempt to refine what they viewed as an overly dogmatic explanation of the core Buddhist doctrine of "insubstantiality (*ineffability, unverifiability*)" called in Sanskrit anatmanvada, and secondly to announce 'the hollowness, or at least

⁸ Thich Thien Chau, *The Literature of the Personalists (Pudgalavadins) of Early Buddhism*, 1996: 5.

⁹ Chau: 138.

insufficiency of the doctrine of "mental elements" known as the skandas.¹⁰ The success of their project required the fulfilment of five additional contingent objectives: 1) 'answer the attacks of non-Bauddha scholars, 2) quell the conniptions of Bauddha ideologues, 3) remain in conformity with original doctrine, 4) satisfy their own need to listen to reason¹¹ and 5) prevent everybody from descending into nihilism.

Perhaps their critics within the Bauddha fold found the pudgala doctrine much too akin to the Vedic Sanskrit Aranyaka and Upashaishadic treatises. Przulski, writing in the late 1920s, relates that the Vatsiputriya School, an important proponent of the Pudgala thesis, flourished in the western region of India among communities where Brahmanism dominated.¹² In the third or fourth century CE the Pudgalavadin Sammitiya School became so influential in the eastern part of India that it eclipsed the Sarvastivadins in Sarnath.¹³ It is critical to note early Chinese accounts that affirm that the Sammitiyas prospered for nearly a millennium. In the second quarter of the seventh century, Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang, who arrived to India overland via Gandhara in 630 CE, calculated more than 1,351 Sammitiya monasteries scattered throughout the Indian subcontinent, housing 66,500 ascetics.¹⁴ Another Chinese monk, I-ching, arrived to the East Coast of India by ship in 673. His narrative speaks of the presence of the Sammitiya sect in the far off Sunda Islands (Indonesia) and "a

¹⁰ T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, 1980 [1955]: 81; cited in Chau: 137, where Chau writes, "the inadequacy of a stream of elements to account for the basic facts of experience, memory, moral responsibility, spiritual life etc."

¹¹ A. Bareau, 'Richesse de la pensée bouddhique ancienne,' in *France-Asie* 153-157, 1959: 453; cited in Chau: 137-8.

¹² J. Przulski, *Le Concile de Rajagraha*, 1926-29: 309-10; cited in Chau: 138.

¹³ Bareau, *Sectes*: 121; cited in Chau: 12

¹⁴ Hsuan-tsang, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, trans. S. Beal, 1981 [1884]; cited in Chau: 14-14.

large group in Champa (Vietnam) where they predominated."¹⁵ Yet in spite of these achievements it was still not enough to earn the doctrinally innovative Pudgalavadins a lasting place in Bauddha orthodoxy. For Stcherbatsky, writing in 1927, the Pudgalvadin or "personalist" development was a pre-figuration of the Mahayana.¹⁶

So is it only now, after more than a millennia, that we begin to perceive (if only vaguely) that this core-Bauddha notion of anatman (no-entity) has been nothing but bent out of all recognition through its re-articulation in a range of idioms blatantly accusative to anyone suspected of "un-Buddhist thought," and which ultimately prompts the tradition (so-called) to inexorably blight and jinx itself into a cruel heightened state of perpetual paranoia over something in the end so honest and clear as this ineffable view of *unverifiability* (anatmanvada)—I ask? Does the dogama of anatman for the bigoted Buddhist stand today as the last remaining crumbling brick of a Fascio-religious wall of apartheid that obvious to most never stood in the first place?

3. Viewing the essential vitality of the "cult": the so-called Theravada

I have hinted at the tracings of a historical muddle that still holds sway within modern Bauddha and which points to a kind of Brahmano-phobic idea-fix with roots most likely well congealed in India as early as 4th century BCE, and whose present expression is especially educed from the so-called Theravada school. (But it is hardly predicated by them alone).

All the same, we need to show restraint here and do our best to waive obscuring usage of the term Theravada (as in "Theravada" Buddhism) and, in stead, use Pali,

¹⁵ Chau: 15, brackets mine, citing Bareu: 121, citing I-ching, A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695), trans. J. Takakusu, 1896: 14, 20.

¹⁶ T. Stcherbatsky, The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana, 1989 [1927].

Sinhalese or Sri Lankan as the qualifier. But the more astute question is, oh by the way, when did the Sinhalese convert en masse to so-called 'Theravada Buddhism'?

According to legend conserved by the Sinhalese, Gautama's teaching was brought to Sri Lanka by missionaries direct from King Asoka's North Indian court about 150 years after Buddha's death. But we don't know *what* (if any) specific school these early Buddhist missionaries may have represented, nor what (if any) collection of texts they allegedly brought with them (if only in their heads) as memorized 'oral texts'. As early as 1933, Edward Thomas very clearly acknowledged the following:

What particular school was represented by the mission of Mahinda [hypothetical son of king Asoka] to Sri Lanka we do not know. No written Scriptures were taken by this mission, as it was not till two centuries later that they are said to have been written down. There may have been such an official recording, but what we possess are not the Scriptures as introduced in the 3rd century BCE (Thomas,1933; words in brackets mine).¹⁷

Taking this as true, then all we can affirm is that a certain party appeared in Sri Lanka sometime after the initial (if legendary) appearance of the Buddha teachings on the island. Yet today nearly every modern Sinhalese Buddhist unquestioningly regards himself as a Theravada Buddhist. But there seems to be no historical basis for this. As far as we can gather, there is no historical record of the Sinhalese people ever having converted en masse to Theravada Buddhism. If indeed this historical event occurred, then crucial questions naturally arise; namely: 1) when did the Sinhalese convert en masse to the so-called School of the Elders or Theravada? 2) What precise school or schools did the Sinhalese adhere to prior to Theravada's (alleged) emergence

¹⁷ E. J. Thomas, The History of Buddhist Thought, 1933.

on the island? 3) Does our data infer that the modern-day remnant of Theravada is conducting business on a fanciful franchise? 4) Does this data go so far as to call into question the Ancient Theravada's historical veracity? Yet, for clarity sake we need to address the basic inadequacy of the question itself on the grounds that so-called "Theravada" could well be an utter and complete misnomer (a parallel probe). We are utilizing rhetoric in attempt to expose an extended socio-anthropological field where essential and intimate remains may be found.

Further questions. How historically valid is the term Theravada? If not a just a modern doctrinal misnomer, would we label Theravada a historical invention? But still (for the sake of interim cohesion and precision) we note that the extant regional varieties of the grouping idiomatically labelled "Theravada" would better be referred to as "Sinhalese" or "Sri Lankan" in reference to the site where they/it apparently first appeared, or else "Pali" in allusion to the language in which these ancient writings were prepared and canonized. In fairness however to the modern Sinhalese, we make passing mention of the ancient Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa legends that tell of the Buddha having personally visited that ancient island-nation of Lanka on three separate occasions. However granting these royally sponsored chronicles no historiographical validity whatsoever¹⁸ – still, what if the Buddha actually *had* flown to Lanka. What for? To press the inhabitants on sectarian issues? To propagate Buddhism? Are we really so sure that the Buddha was a Buddhist? These are academic questions.

¹⁸ There is little historical value (strictly speaking) in either Dipavamsa or Mahavamsa chronicles. William Geiger (trans, The Mahavamsa, or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon, 1908) viewed the Mahavamsa as a conscious and intentional rearrangement of earlier (Dipavamsa) texts, though conceded that they are founded on older historical work. V.A. Smith (Asoka, the Buddhist Emperor of India, 1901) spoke far less discreetly: "the Ceylonese chronology [derived from the chronicles] prior to B.C. 160 is absolutely and completely rejected as being not merely of doubtful authority but positively false in its principal propositions."

Responding as a social-anthropologist, if I may, I would view the essential vitality of the cult as inseparable from its greater Brahmanical field. Concerning the founder of this extremely long enterprise, I categorically identify the man we call the Buddha as a Kshatriya-caste Hindu named Gautama. And in boldly underscoring his Indian-ness, I gladly part company with those who persist in shoring up the walls of spiritual apartheid in effort to partition pan-Indian culture from their restricted enclave of true salvation. Going one further, I would cast this Brahmano-Buddhic complex as intrinsically rooted in the Religion of the Mother that 'in ancient times reigned across an immense Aegeo-Afrasiatic territory, and which has always been the major form of piety in India' (Eliade). Applying this code to ascetic practice, I declare my position with no equivocation: The Buddha was a master of yoga-tantra; which is why the Buddh(a), together with its -ism, can never be conceived as something beyond, or incongruous *to* its aboriginal Indian premise.

There is a very significant saying in India: "Never compare the beauty of the daughter with that of the mother." Nonetheless the Bauddha-, quite distinct from the Jaina-cult, has long maintained its own particular and highly detailed relationship to the greater Brahmanical cultural field, as it largely endures in contradistinction to its misconstrued notion of the meaning of Hindu.

4. Yoga confused with Hinduism

It seems really weird that even in Asia, yoga is confused with Hinduism. This shows the degree to which Eastern thinking is affected by Western models of marketization. But it also shows how little of yoga's true spirit is actually lived these days; how little of its ancient practices even survive. We also find the yoga of "Theravada" Buddhism (if we may say) – especially the attention that it pays to the

breath – to be very close to Patanjali's Yoga. But the problem is discussion and study alone will never disclose the importance of these matters. To understand yoga it has to be practiced. And even more than practiced, it has to be lived.

One wonders why the concepts of Buddhism and Hinduism are always described and analysed as if they naturally stood in opposition to each other. We offer the following methodological tip: instead of seeking differences, trace the similarities. Minus its profusion of anthropomorphic deities, the highest vision of Advaita Vedanta, or so-called Hindu Philosophy, is precisely the vision of Buddhist liberation. These are not two currents: political and cultural special effects have only made it seem that way. In fact, right around the world what people are taught to revere as religion amounts to little more than cultural accretion, the obscuration of hollow rites and sanctimonious rituals. What the heart most seeks is an intimate lucidity of knowing peace. There are four guiding principles: simplicity, honesty, sincerity and friendliness. Tarnish is often best removed by simply polishing the artefacts.

5. What is the meaning of Hindu?

Let's take a look at the meaning of Hindu and try to determine its relationship to India and thereby Buddhism. As a modern expression, Hindu came from the very early Indo-Iranian root *sindhu*, or in the "Proto" Indo-Iranian language, *sindhus*, which directly refers to the "Indus River" and the culture pertaining to its long expansive valley. Here is where *Sindhu* (or so-called "Hindu") culture initially evolved. Subsequently at a very early date around 500-300 BCE, Persian explorers entered the Indian subcontinent from the far Northwest and upon returning home they published chronicles. But due to the phonetics of the Persian language, the "s" of *Sind* became an aspirated "h," and that's how the people of the Indus Valley came to be

known as "Hindus" by the Persians. At a much later time this tonal corruption was re-imported to the area east of the Indus Valley when he conquering Persian speaking Moguls naturally referred to the locals as "Hindus."¹⁹ Inevitably the ethnonym "Hindu" stuck and was adopted by the Indians themselves as a way of distinguishing indigenous culture from the exogenous customs of the immigrant Muslims. But still it should be noted that even today there is a region, a people and a language known as Sind.²⁰ According to Richard King (1999),

Although indigenous use of the term by Hindus themselves can be found as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, its usage was a derivative of Persian Muslim influences and did not represent anything more than a distinction between 'indigenous' or 'native' and foreign (mleccha).²¹

What is the origin of the English word India? Sindhu, which evolved into the Old Persian word hindus, was subsequently borrowed into Greek as Indos. In this way the modern term "India" is pretty much derived from the ancient Greek, which simply changed the Persian 'H' to 'I.' Interestingly, it was the Greek form, Indos, that eventually formed the name of the country India, combining the stem ind- with the suffix -ia, a typical method of forming the names of countries in Greek. However the English name for the river Indus actually comes from the Latin form of the Greek. The Classical Greek term indikos and the Greco-Latin indicus are equivalent descriptives that hold the sense of 'Indian, pertaining or having to do with India.' Correspondingly, the Latin botanical term for Indian hemp is Cannibis indica.

¹⁹ Yet perhaps it is not a 'flawed intonation' after all. In ancient Iranian, 'h' is the normal outcome of an Indo-Iranian 's' in this position.

²⁰ Arabic "Al-Hind" is another Persian-derived word that denotes the same geographical area.

²¹ R. King, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism,'" in *Numen* 46, 2, 1999; see also D.N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, 4, 1999: 630-59.

Summing up, the original word for both India *and* Hindu is the very ancient Indo-Iranian word *sindhu*, which the Persians mispronounced and re-established in India as "hindu." The Greeks mispronounced this and gave us "Indu," the indirect source of English "India." But the crucial point to reflect upon here is that as Hindu and India are ultimately derived from the identical Indo-Iranian word, any subsequent difference in meaning would have to be seen as largely contrived: and this is what happens in contemporary usage, taking India as a place and Hindu its culture. Chinese language gets it right. Chinese In Du (印度) denotes at once both the place *and* the inhabitants *of* India. In contrast to this, however, the semantic muddle displayed in English nearly screams for rectification. For rationally Hindu would simply mean "Indian." One begins to see the confusion here. The analysis implies that in modern usage "Hindus" are simply the people born in India, and not the followers of any specific religion. This challenges our effort to speak and think consistently. To make real progress perhaps it is necessary to come to a decision on whether Hindus constitute a religious community or not.

From our own point of view the answer is clear. Hindu neither denotes nor connotes a religion per se – *nor any religious community*. It has no direct connection to religion. At best it implies a tentative community: by a 'tentative community' I look to the fact that none of the various Indian religions require the suffixation of "-ism"; particularly, that is, as the "-ism" attempts to discern the degree to which there exists retention *of* or origin *in* a presupposing Vedic or Brahmanical field; hence the traditional normative schema, "Brahmanical, heretical and foreign." Curiously, however, gurus constitute the principle religion in India today because people don't normally belong to temples or churches, but honour instead a personal guru. Bearing in mind this critical schema, we would further suggest that the ancient institution of

the guru in India is fundamentally heretical, or stated more civilly heterodoxical, i.e. a tradition contrary to Brahmanical priesthood and that fails to accept Vedic Literature as inviolable truth. This traditional hereticism of the guru in India may very well speak to the truest heart of Hindu religion, which naturally includes the Buddha; or not?

Yet whatever the extent one agrees or disagrees with this, a methodological dilemma confronts us. Under the general description of Hindu as 'an inhabitant of the land lying east of the Indus Valley (especially true for around 500-300 BC),' both Jains and Buddhists would be "Hindu" in origin. But that aside, it may also prove exciting, if not edifying, to attempt a consistent and comprehensive statement that defines Hinduism as a precise and particular religious theory with bracketed community. And yet again, Hindu-ism, and I underscore the -ism, can only "imply" a religious community; and a very tentative one at that.

Perhaps the main culprit is the suffixed "-ism." I find this obsessive and unchecked fusing of "-ism" to the end of uncountable conceptual terms one of the most un-scholarly predilections that we of the academic breed display, and which for sure makes the catchall "Hindu-ism" an annoying term that denies any helpful characterization. We can well assume that the word was contrived by Western scholarship in the early part of the 19th century. The Oxford English Dictionary traces "Hindooism" to its 1829 usage in the Bengalee, 45, as a blanket term for the "polytheism of India." Of parallel interest, this only makes "Buddhism" slightly older, being first attested in 1801.

As a final point of reiteration, the modern term "Hindu" simply means "Indian," "made in India," "a product of (as it were) Hindustan."

6. Yoga as the science of emancipation

I learned the art of yoga from my personal. His rediscovery and restoration of a range of classical and vernacular yoga elements are seminal to an imminent renaissance of Southeast Asian ascetic arts. It was my greatest life fortune to have studied with this saint.

He imbued his instruction with a cogent appraisal of the religious culture into which he was born. Engagements with the ancient Buddha teachings were natural. But the guru was by no means a divisive rebel. As a private ascetic who managed that leap beyond the baffling quagmires of ethnicity and nescience, he stood as a shimmering demonstration that humanity belonged to one religion, the religion of the heart, conceptually and practically founded on yoga. The guru taught yoga to thousands of people.

In a moment I will speak of three foundational deductive suppositions that Yoga and Buddhism share alike with regard to "the science of emancipation", or soteriology (yoga) if you will. However, keep in mind that the theoretic points pertain to nearly every philosophical school in India, orthodox and heterodox (whatever your standpoint). As classical soteriological schools, both Buddhism and Yoga need to be viewed as two approaches among many other disciplines. But there is one elemental distinction to declare. This: small "y" yoga is not a religion, but has always been adopted and adapted by religions. In the guru's view, a yogi, or a yogini, is just one type of ascetic artist who is searching for an end to the life's problems and hardships. Speaking metaphorically, the goal of each religion is to reach the summit of a glorious

mountain. The mountain is a metaphor for the summum bonum. Yoga is only one path among many others.²²

Broadly speaking, the Vedic term yoga pertains to any type of asceticism or meditative technique. This naturally encompasses ritual and prayer.²³ Generically, yoga is a compendium of conceptions, practices and techniques that have long been adopted, adapted and tinkered with; buffed and applied by all religious ascetic regimes. By embracing the conception of a collective religion we begin to comprehend that we are not alone in our urgent need to surmount human suffering; such nostalgia being, in effect, a universal sentiment.

7. Enter the rishi

In one of the guru's three Thai language publications, he explains why people, and particularly Thai people hold many vague and incorrect ideas concerning the nature of yoga practice. He clearly explains why people in Thailand think that a yogi is synonymous to a hermit. It's because in the Thai language a hermit is called a ruesi from Sanskrit rishi, "a forest dwelling visionary." This is what he wrote:

²² Quoted in P. Pramualaratana, "Confronting Life's Problems through Yoga", Bangkok Post, Sunday supplement (12 July 1987).

²³ According to a Monier-Williams Sanskrit dictionary, there are no less than 40 subsidiary meanings. See Appendix II: Forty-two Sanskrit definitions of yoga. Theos Bernard (Heaven Lies Within Us, 1940), deduced 17 different meanings as follows: union or methods of union; any outside thing united to another outside thing; the mixing of one thing with another as with sugar to water; the uniting of cause with effects as with sparks and the fire producing them; a method of keeping things in their proper place; a symbolism with an inner meaning like a code or proverb; to hide one thing and try to show another, as a conjurer would do, or to signify a thing without telling it as in a hint; different significance of words that vary according to different minds; physical exercise; proper composition of language to convey description; any kind of skill or dexterity; methods to protect one's possessions, physical, mental, spiritual; to find means of acquiring things by deep contemplation, as the solution of a mathematical problem; conversion of one substance to another as in chemistry; to unite two souls for any purpose; to produce a current of thought for a specific attainment; to take a specific object or concept and make the mind follow it to the exclusion of all else; to suspend all activity (mental) and to concentrate the heart upon one particular thing.

Due to customary Thai folklore, people commonly picture yogis as bearded, unkempt and unclean ascetics, living naked and alone in the forest depths while subsisting on gathered herbs and vegetables. Through piercing concentration and arcane sorcery, they imagine that yogis can lie on beds of nails, be buried alive and withstand extreme temperatures while standing on their heads. They believe that yogis can perform marvellous feats, such as flying about on magic carpets, or creating goddesses out of thin air and making them their spiritual consorts!

"But don't be misled," the guru cautions his readers:

A practitioner of yoga is by no means required to retire from the secular world, sever all relations with human society and dwell in the seclusion of a comfortless cave. He can go on leading a fully active mundane existence, and when he walks down the road he can be quite sure that nobody would take a second look at him, or find in him anything peculiar.

In particular regard to the rishi, however, it is important to note that in a very early Buddhist text the Buddha himself is referred to as the "rishi," though expressed in Pali language as "isi."²⁴

8. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

While undergoing training at Wat Suan Mokh, the famous forest hermitage of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the present writer was exceptionally honoured to have gained private meetings with the age stricken patriarch of modern Isthmian or Southern Thai Buddhism. Our talks ranged widely but consistently centred on the topics of Buddhism, Vedanta and Yoga. Buddhadasa told me very candidly: "It is proper for monks to practice yoga, but they should do it in private."

²⁴ "[H]aving seen that the Isi had entered..." See I.B. Horner, trans., Mahavagga (I, 15, 6), 1951: 34.

One cool morning as I sat on the pebbles, among the rich foliage and towering trees, the venerable teacher confided further, saying, "Anyone that understands the essence of his own religion understands the essence of all religions." Buddhadasa's highly advanced perspective moved me deeply. Later up in Bangkok, I related this to the guru. He paused in deference and lowered his tone. "Of course there should only be one world religion. I know that and you know that. But be careful. If you go around trying to tell others of that, you're liable to get shot."

9. The royal eight-fold path of yoga

Throughout the guru's long and illustrious career, he strove to reveal the vital similarities between Yoga and Buddhism – perhaps ancient India's two most important asceto-philosophical approaches. In fact, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu also spoke openly and wrote on what he intimately knew as Raja-yoga, the classical and oldest known yoga school that dates back more than two thousand years. In the Sanskrit language, raja means, king. This "kingly yoga" was first given shape by the time-honoured Indian sage Patanjali in his roughly third century classic treatise Yoga Sutras (Yoga Aphorisms). This system is also known as ashtanga-yoga. In Sanskrit, ashta means eight and anga means part. This is why Patanjali's Raja-yoga is sometimes referred to as "The Royal Eight-fold Path of Yoga."

10. Buddha as yogi

The great similarities between Buddhism and Yoga have led many scholars to accept their common pre-historical source. At their fundamental soteriological levels these ancient doctrines share identical assumptions. They are three in number: 1) man experiences a non-specific dissatisfaction, 2) he wants to bring such hardships to an end, and 3) there are means to this end.

We know for a certainty (according to the legends) that as a fledgling ascetic Gautama thoroughly steeped himself in the pre-classic Indian philosophy of his highly revered teacher Arada Kalama 'living midst the forests and cave rich hills of the Vindhya Mountains near Vaishali.' It was his second guru, the "Thera"²⁵ Udraka Ramaputra, who taught the Bodhisattva the principles of yoga. Thus as early as 1900, the esteemed French savant Emile Senart arrived to the singularly crucial conclusion that, "It was on the terrain of Yoga that the Buddha arose; whatever innovations he was able to introduce into it, the mould of Yoga was that in which his thought was formed."²⁶

Later writers express the same idea. 'How could Buddha, possessor of unequalled intelligence, spend six years of his life in vain?' states Japanese writer Kanjitsu Iijima: "It is an undeniable historical fact that Yoga played a part in the origin of Buddhism."²⁷ Sri Lankan professor Ananda Guruge concurs: "Though the self-mortification implied in [early Indian asceticism] was not approved by the Buddha, the yogic element...formed a basic feature in the course of training by the Buddha."²⁸ But Austrian Professor Erich Frauwallner is the most incisive writer to date to affirm yoga's role in the development of early Buddhism. In his two-volume History of Indian Philosophy, Frauwallner notes, "With the Buddhistic doctrine the Yoga was connected from the beginning, because it was the way by which The Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, had found Deliverance."²⁹

²⁵ See note 6 above.

²⁶ E. Senart, "Bouddhism et Yoga," 1900.

²⁷ K. Iijima, Buddhist Yoga, 1975: 21.

²⁸ A. Guruge, The Society of the Ramayana, 1991: 289, brackets mine.

²⁹ E. Frauwallner, History of Indian Philosophy, 1973, 1:321.

As legend has it, The Buddha spent six years undergoing serious yoga training. But after he reached the highest plane he still felt the urge to go beyond. Conventionally, yogis have approached the goal of emancipation by two general soteriological means. One is the way of metaphysical knowledge; the other is the path of ascetic practice. The first of these approaches is often called viveka, "the razor-edge path of sage discrimination." The second approach is usually distinguished by a predilection for exploring the myriad states of human consciousness through yoga techniques. Now as for yoga and the majority of the early Buddhist schools, greater emphasis is normally given to the ascetic path of yoga practice. Gautama's strategy was similar to this. However, 'during his period of yoga training he experienced such powerful feelings of happiness and joy that he began to regard them as dangerous and something to be avoided. Then he overcame this fear and began to strengthen his weakened body to prepare the ground for his re-discovered remedy, which was joy (ananda). He had previously believed that the heightened agony of self-mortification was the only valid means to liberation. Yet now in contrast he understood that the peaceful joy of a concentrated mind was a finer path to follow' (Lama Govinda).³⁰

It cannot be over-stressed that in the Buddha's own quest he achieved his renowned illumination while actually practicing yoga – that is, while seated in padma-asana, otherwise known as the "lotus pose." When this posture is performed it gives the appearance of a lotus flower. In the Sanskrit language, padma means, lotus. Stylistically, yogis have regarded this posture as the king of yoga asanas, the most suitable posture for taking on the higher forms of yoga, that is, concentration, absorption and serene composure (unification). But we need to add a word of warning here: the basic prescription in attempting such a practice is that the seated posture

³⁰ Govinda, *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness*, 1976.

should be easy and comfortable. One should never hurry or force any aspect of yoga practice. One should proceed very slowly and never go beyond ones physical or mental capacity. This corroborates well with Nalinaksha Dutt (1980) who elaborated the Buddha's personal desire to keep his yoga-path free from anything fanciful, severe or unrelated to the concentration of the mind:

The Buddhist path of meditation is thus a simplified process in which the elements of the yoga exist sometimes with slight modifications but which [are always] kept clear of [anything] looked upon as unnecessary, extraneous or dangerous. It is suited to whoever joins the monastic order, provided by sila, he had succeeded in developing frames of body and mind in which he could launch himself on an attempt at concentration of mind leading to the ultimate wisdom.³¹

11. Buddha as Indian, i.e. Hindu³²

As legend has it, Siddhartha Gautama was born to a people leading pastoral lives in the richly forested Himalayan foothills near to the present-day Indian-Nepalese frontier. His father was a local chieftain named Suddhodana. Yet we need to bear in mind that from his birth until his death the Buddha was a Kshatriya or warrior-caste Hindu. In fulfilment of his duties as an Indian youth, he studied under various Brahmin gurus and learned the essentials of Indian knowledge, or as much, that is, as may have been divulged to a child of non-Brahmin birth.

³¹ N. Dutt, *The Spread of Buddhism and The Buddhist Schools*, 1980: 10, brackets mine.

³² As previously discussed (see above), the etymology of "Hindu" simply means "Indian." My current usage is therefore rhetorical; for the very idea, Gombrich rightly states, of "Hinduism" existing at the remotely historic period of the Buddha would be "wildly anachronistic." We should therefore not be bothered by this. See R. Gombrich, 1997: 15.

Honouring his commitment to the chaste student life (Brahmacharya-asrama),³³ Gautama then entered the second of the four obligatory stages (ashrama) of a male caste-Indian.³⁴ This was Grihastha-ashrama or the householder-stage when a young man agrees to accept a wife and assume the duties as the head of a household. For the sake of posterity, fathering a son was a social imperative. Now the third life-stage, known as Vanaprastha-ashrama (lit. "forest-dweller stage"), was reserved for the time when the hairs on a man's head begin to turn grey, and when his eldest son is himself well established with a wife and son of his own.

But it seems the Bodhisattva (or Buddha-to-be) rather glossed these second and third stages over, having scarcely discharged his caste obligation to the minimal extent of stealthily peeping through the door of the chamber where his wife laid recovering from their first born child. There she slept, the enchanting Yashodhara, suckling her newborn son Rahula on the very night "that fetter"³⁵ appeared. This was also the night when out of paramount disgust for the decadent life he had hitherto led, the prince absconded from the prison of his palace and plunged headlong into the fourth and final stage of a male caste-Kshatriya's life called Sannyasa-ashrama. Sannyasa-ashrama is dramatically marked by a severing act of complete and total renunciation in quest for spiritual transmutation.

It is significant to ponder that some years later when Gautama (a fully enlightened Buddha) learned of his father having fallen gravely ill, he hastened to the

³³ The four Indian social castes, or varnas, are brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and sudra.

³⁴ Ashrama literally means "stage" or "station" and refers to the recognized stages of life that affect Indian males of the three higher castes. There are four such ashrama. They are brahmacharya-ashrama (student-stage), grihastha-asrama (householder-stage), vanaprastha-ashrama (forest-dweller stage) and sannyasa-ashrama (surrender-stage).

³⁵ In the Pali language rahula means "fetter."

town of his parental home and remained steadfast at his dying father's side. Later in accordance with the Indian custom, he conducted the rites of the funeral pyre.

12. The forbidden Buddha

One cannot be blind to the obvious fact the Buddhist religion was born in India, that epochal land of world renunciation where philosophers, ascetics and a vast array of religious visionaries had long set their sights on a pristine spontaneity often called nirvana. Nor can one forget that in its primacy, the Buddha's doctrine was not conceived as a new religion. What is widely viewed today as "Buddhism" should actually be seen as the natural outgrowth of a great cenobitical heritage dating back roughly 3,000 years. It is also apparent that the Buddha himself foresaw and feared the eventual error of his yogic movement transforming itself into a full-blown religious cult. Attempting to forestall this ineluctable shift, Gautama strongly forbade his followers to fashion images of his human form. We know from history that for many generations following the Buddha's physical demise, a tremendous reverence was maintained among his devotees to observe this important prohibition.

Yet slowly and steadily as adherents grew, they began implicit commemoration; first through memorial stupas, later by cut stone bas-reliefs of the figurative Bo tree. At Sanchi, for example, to handle the Buddha's ineffable being, carved expanses of sea and skies were suggested, around which adoring devotees were depicted with palms pressed together or prostrate. Sometime later at Bharhut and Amaravati, and Sanchi too, a significant thematic advance was achieved as the patrons of the arts dared to go a step further and began to hint at the Buddha's presence through an empty chair or princely throne. Other typical representations were a lotus flower, a single pillar or a juggernaut wheel (dharma-chakra). Now, the final stage of this

circumscribing urge to worship the forbidden image of the Saviour expressed itself through the Budha's hallowed footprints as impressed upon a cut stone lotus-shaped pedestal.

In 326 BCE Alexander of Macedonia entered the region of Northwest Pakistan, known in those times as Gandhara. Gandhara's chief city Taxila (Takshashila) was a wealthy, prosperous and well-governed cultural centre and important meeting place of Indian and Mediterranean cultures from the 5th century BCE. Situated near to present-day Islamabad, Taxila was ancient India's most prestigious seat of learning and a place where rich families sent their children to be taught by eminent teachers. The Greek philosopher Anaxarchus, together with his protégé Pyrrho of Elis travelled to this region in the train of Alexander's overland invasion. There they mixed with the odd appearing gymnosophists or "naked philosophers" and a whole menagerie of other ascetics.³⁶ It is curious however that upon Anaxarchus and Pyrrho's return to Greece, they founded not a school of meditative mysticism as one might expect, but the first Greek school of Scepticism.³⁷

From this early period of Mediterranean influence Indian monarchs and patrons of the arts acquired a passion for Greek sculptural genius. In spite of this, it still took many centuries before Buddha-statuary received commissions. But it was there at Gandhara that anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha first appeared, strongly redolent of Apollo the Orator. The Gandhara School of Buddhist sculpture evolved a unique artistic style through the fusion of prevailing naturalist Indian elements with the realist spirit brought by Greco-Roman sculpture. Very soon after this Gandharan breakthrough, the older Indian Mathura School with its centre at Mathura on the

³⁶ Parivrajaka is the broad designation for early Indian "wandering ascetic."

³⁷ See J. Burnet, "Sceptics," 1920.

banks of the Yamuna, succumbed as well to the tantalizing urge to fashion the corporal form of Buddha as the personification of nirvana.³⁸

It is crucial to grasp the chronological fact that "the representation of the historical Buddha in human form first took place about the 2nd century of the Christian era" – about six centuries after Gautama's death.³⁹ This infers that it took six hundred years for the Buddhist faithful to finally transgress their founder's prohibition. But at long last the sentiment of bhakti prevailed and the Buddha-bhaktas ("devotees of the Buddha") surrendered en masse to the huge pan-Indian religious urge to enshrine the mortal form of the immortal – the embodiment of enlightenment, the supreme personification of divinity (purushottama).

13. Buddha as Brahman

Nirvana is the goal, indeed, the summum bonum of all ancient Indian spiritual systems. From the post-Vedic period to our present day, it is important to grasp the fact that throughout this long three-thousand-year history, all sincere Indian seekers of the truth, whatever their sectarian persuasions may have been, pursued one thing and one thing alone: a consummate reality beyond human pain. What is more, they sought this by means of yoga. Ernest Wood, an Englishman who spent 38 years studying yoga in India, explained that the Sanskrit term nirvana is not at all confined to

³⁸ Scholarly debate is actually not settled over which of these two schools, Gandhara or Mathura, was the first to fashion the anthropomorphic Buddha. Leaving this question to future research, we can certainly remark that each school evolved its own independent artistic mode of rendering of the image of the Buddha. See D.E. Saunders, 1960: 13.

³⁹ Ibid.

Buddhist scriptures or Buddhist philosophy, but was plainly employed in pre-Buddhist India and thus plays a part in all Indian philosophy.⁴⁰

Gautama Buddha never denied the existence of an unconditioned reality or "naked truth," the knowledge of which could usher the boon of emancipation to ignorant man. It was just that he showed extreme discretion by declining to openly speak on this in fear that discussion would only obstruct a person's passage to the goal itself. This is why the Buddha categorically denied the possibility of either discussing or experiencing absolute truth so long as man was not yet awakened.

Assuming the veracity of the Pali scriptures and barring the possibility that the Buddha may have said things that didn't get recorded, we could then infer that the Buddha denounced neither the doctrine of atman (substance/self) nor brahman (ultimate reality). But rather that the Buddha only aimed to reproach such professors (thereof) for their unrestrained loquacity regarding such themes that he felt ought to rather be treated as ineffable. Maintaining that "atman exists, is real and permanent," was according to the Buddha a wrong assertion. Conversely, to assert that "atman does *not* exist, is *not at all* real and does *not* last," was equally regarded as wrong assertion. Yet trying to determine what the Buddha did hold as the ultimate goal of the spiritual seeker, it could only be "freedom in this very life." Such a person is known as a jivan-mukta, a "liberated being," who in the scriptural words of the Buddha himself is "even in this life cut off, nirvan-ized, aware of happiness within himself and living with his soul identified with Brahman"⁴¹ or "godhead" in the parlance of comparative religion. The equation here implied is, "He who sees the Buddha, sees the Truth", or Buddha = Brahman = Dharma. In this way, the Buddha is not *like* brahman,

⁴⁰ E. Wood, *Great Systems of Yoga*, 1967: 25.

⁴¹ See I.B. Horner, trans., *Gradual Sayings III (Anguttara-nikaya)* (PTS, 1994), II: 206.

but *is* brahman, "the lord of the world," the omniscient master of dharma, "natural law." The Vedic term dharma means, "to hold," or "support," it is that which forms a foundation and "upholds" and represents the universal form or infrastructure. Dharma is the interpreted order of the world. In theological parlance, dharma equals god. Epistemologically, dharma indicates the scaffolding of human thought and conception intent on the knowledge of ultimate things. The knower thus becomes the incorporation of the knowable, "a self-awakened being" (samma-sambuddha).⁴²

14. The cosmic axis: being in the body

Buddhist India was a very different world a millennium after Gautama's death. A baroque revolution of vast dimension was in full cultural swing. Yogis preached a new alchemical philosophy based on the notion of a "cosmic body." Their philosophy also laid tremendous importance on the mystical implications of prana as "life-force." This tantric philosophical advancement is seen to have exerted a profound influence on every aspect of Indian cultural life and the varied Buddhist schools were not aloof from this astounding pan-Indian revolution. In the Esoteric Buddhist text Hevajra-Tantra, the Buddha, as Bhagavan, is made to extol the virtues of physical fitness: "Without a perfectly healthy body, one cannot know bliss."

What is more, in the compelling symbolism of the Buddhist Tantra, the body of the Buddha is identified with the cosmic universe. His spinal column, called the merudanda, is said to be a single bone that represents a reality beyond time and space; a withdrawn, autonomous zone of purity, a non-differential void called sunya. This mystical backbone is further described as a secret cavern within Mount Kailas where esoteric truth is revealed to the yogin while absorbed in the unexcelled state of

⁴² See I. B. Horner, 1994: II, 206.

meditation. This helps to interpret why, according to a legend, the Buddha was unable to turn his head, but had to turn his entire body because his spinal column was fixed and motionless like the cosmic pillar. This is also known as the axis mundi, a primordial symbol that represents a placement at the centre of the world, and which supports and connects the three cosmic spheres of heaven, earth and netherworld. As a "pillar" it ensures support of the universal order. This further corresponds with the spinal column so that the centre of the universe is interiorized and detected at the centre of the heart, as an axis traversing the chakras.

15. The cobra

The backbone plays a crucial role in yoga practice. Tremendous emphasis is therefore placed on the 33 bones called vertebrae that make up the human spinal column⁴³ and the spinal cord that runs through its centre connecting the brain to the bottom of the spine where the triangular sacrum lies. Sacrum comes from the ancient Latin medical term *Os sacrum*, literally "holy bone." This seems to infer that ancient doctors held the hand-size base of the vertebral column and the nexus of nerves embedded therewith, in special regard, and that the sacrum denoted a "sacred place" in the human corporal structure. The entire backbone is a beautiful structural. If detached from the skeleton and carefully examined, its slim configuration from the tip of the coccyx as it gently curves upward through the sacral, lumbar, dorsal and cervical vertebrae, shows amazing likeness to an up-raised cobra.

⁴³ The vertebral bones are piled one upon the other thus forming a pillar for the support of the cranium and trunk. They are connected together by spinous, transverse and articular processes and by pads of fibro-cartilage between the bones. The arches of the vertebrae form the hollow cylinder of a bony covering for the passage of the spinal cord (Sw. Sivananda, 1995).

For these and other reasons the guru's teaching places much value on developing a poised and graceful bodily posture. With posture well poised, the linear curve has a striking resemblance to a magnificent up-raised cobra. Maybe this is why the symbol of the cobra has always played an important role in ancient cultures from Egypt to India and other Asian lands. It is the naja of Egypt, the naga of India. It is furthermore known as kundalini, a "the coiled little she-serpent" sleeping at the base of the spine. With its dilated neck taking the shape of a hood, the cobra has always been a royal emblem, feminine, majestic and deeply mysterious. The cobra is therefore an archetypal symbol for the transfigurative power of primordial nature.

Though generally unacknowledged in Buddhist traditions, this universal symbolism nonetheless appears in the well-known legend of the Mucalinda Buddha. The episode occurred in the sixth week after the Buddha's illumination when he dwelt in bliss beneath the Mucalinda Tree near to the shores of Lake Mucalinda near Gaya. Suddenly a torrential storm broke out, but the Buddha, absorbed in meditation, paid no heed to the rising lake. As the waters were just about to swallow up the Buddha, the naga of the lake, called also Mucalinda, coiled his huge body protectively around the Buddha and shielded him with his seven heads.

Now an esoteric deconstructive reading of the Mucalinda legend opens a noteworthy observation and shows that the symbol of the rising serpent is certainly related to the yoga technique of arousing the psychic energy known as kundalini. In his discussion of ancient Khmer Buddha statuary, Wibke Lobo shares this view:

Given the great significance that yoga must have had for the initiates, it would be strange if the image of the erect serpent had not been brought into association with the awakening of cosmic energy. In this connection it would also be possible to recognize a

system of mystical numbers in the seven heads and three coils [of the naga], for they can be linked to the set of seven centres of energy (chakras) in the human body and to the three highest of these in the throat and head, where Enlightenment takes place.⁴⁴

Nowhere has the profundity of this esoteric yoga been more passionately expressed than through this stunning image of the Buddha protected by the Naga. It may also be referred to as Kundalini Buddha. The Khmer in particular have shown great passion in expressing the trance-like nature of this motif with extraordinary sculptural genius. Elegantly adorned with diadem, earrings and necklace, the Buddha sits splendidly with his hands folded calmly in his lap in the posture of dhyana-yoga. Three thick coils of the naga's body form the Buddha's throne while the serpent's dilated seven-headed hood rears up behind the Buddha's head in a protective almost cocooning manner.

It is further worth noting that during his lifetime Gautama the Buddha was probably not known as "The Buddha" at all, but Shakyaputra Shramana. And while shakyaputra tells of the Buddha's ethnic origins (lit. a "man of the Shakya clan"), shramana denotes his ascetic vocation in accordance with a primitive or pre-Aryan mode of ascetic technology. How else are we to interpret the story of the Buddha returning to his native city Kapilavastu for the first time after his Grand Illumination? In order to win his kinsmen over he is said to have demonstrated "miraculous powers." Before the eyes of his astonished audience, he rose into the air and cut his body to pieces. All of the pieces fell to the ground, and then he put them back together. Linguistically, "shaman" seems to have entered our European lexicons by way of Russian, but only subsequently as received from the language of the Tungus, a Mongolian people widely spread across Eastern Siberia. However, earlier lexical

⁴⁴ W. Lobo, "The Figure of Hevajra and Tantric Buddhism," 1997.

associations might stem from the Aryan languages of India where the Sanskrit shramana pertains to a movement of ascetic wanderers that developed in India from the 6th century BCE.⁴⁵ This further suggests that the Buddha be regarded not only as history's seminal shaman but as a highly developed Tantric yogin.

16. The tantric conception

In those days, however, the conception of "tantra" may have been very different than what it is today. In its very early usage a tantric practitioner denoted a "weaver" with the strong connotations of making magic. Indeed, a basic facet of the tantric conception is that the cosmos is composed of a boundless filament of 'magical force that can be organized and aroused within the human body precisely through the practices of mystical physiology.'⁴⁶ The tantric conception is therefore based on an

⁴⁵ See M. Eliade, *Shamanism*, 1964: 311-41. See also G. Thompson, "Adhrigu and Drigu: on the Semantics of an Old Indo-Iranian Word," 2006. In his personal email, "Re: zramaNa," 2002) [editing, brackets and modified transliteration mine]:

Though the verbal root *shram-* appears to have good Indo-European roots [cf. Greek *kremamai*, *kremnos*; Old German *hirmen*, and discussion in Mayrhofer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoirischen*, 1986: vol. II, 664], *shramana* itself is unattested in Old Vedic [although *Rig Veda* *hasashramana*, but in the sense 'untiring', not 'monk']. First attestation of the meaning 'monk' is the middle-Vedic text *Shatapatha Brahmana*.

It appears that Sanskrit *shramana* is an old Indo-European word that developed in India a novel semantics to convey a novel cultural institution...of the monk. This is not to say that similar notions did not precede this one. *Shramana* as 'monk' became a much-traveled culture-word, accompanying the Buddhist migrations. The Greeks knew the word [*Samanaioi*, *Sarmanoi*, etc]. It shows up in Buddhist Sogdian texts, in Khotanese [and] Modern Persian[,]Tocharian, Chinese, and Altaic [Tungusic]. It eventually turns up quite early in the [European] languages... [see Thompson, "Adhrigu and Drigu: on the Semantics of an Old Indo-Iranian Word," a paper on an old Indo-Iranian word **drigu*, 'poor, dependent, faithful'... a term of self-designation used by Zoroastrians, including Zarathustra himself], from which eventually emerged the word which in English surfaces as 'dervish.' In fact, in some Iranian languages, derivatives of **drigu* were used to gloss the term *shramana*.

See also T. Harris, "From Holy Beggar to Bhikkhu to Dervish," 2006.

⁴⁶ Cf. Eliade, *Yoga*, 1964: 21.

alchemical⁴⁷ understanding of the human corporal structure as a "continuum of energy." This energy or life-force is essentially pure as it issues from a metaphorical matrix-loom, a unified-field interwoven, as it were, with the backdrop of infinity. Phenomenologically, existence is perceived as the panoply of thing-event-fields pervaded by a force of homogenic resonance. Tantra means to tap this resonant source and enter the fabric of life altogether; and in this way, every single scrap and thread gets turned into a privileged moment⁴⁸ and *inducement* to contribute to the seamless continuity of being. Through faith or "bhakti," which is giving or "dana" one goes to the periphery where the antipodes eclipse in inexplicable bliss.

17. My body, my meditation

As Tantra evolved into a historical movement, it assumed the vast proportions of a baroque revolution and achieved sustained and far-reaching effects in the cultural fields of philosophy, science, literature and art. It was during the third-century advent of Tantra that an explicitly sexual idiom emerged together with an openly erotic iconography. This highly provocative meta-sensual approach has continued to arouse public interest to our day. This is currently reflected in a market driven climate of tabloid spirituality that has managed to recast the central conception into a celebrated New Age commodity fetish apparently intent on a comprehensive tantrification of the masses.

Actually Tantra is very rich in meaning, but can also be frustratingly vague and elusive—hence all the more compelling. But truthfully, sex plays a very small role.

⁴⁷ Alchemy is an Arabic/Egyptian word: al, "the" + chemistry, "transformation." Indian alchemy is known as rasavada or rasayana. Its science centres on performing certain operations and concocting drugs, most of which are taken from plants, in order to obtain the "elixir of life." Its practical aims are restoring health, regaining youth, and extending longevity. See Sachau, trans. (2 vols.), 1910: I: 188-89, as cited in Eliade, *Yoga*: 278, n.

⁴⁸ A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, English trans., 1955.

It's just that everyone's so interested in sex! Still, for some the mere mention of the word makes them blush. Why is that? Because religion has taught us that sex is indecent and opposed to the spiritual life.

Tantra has a different take on the matter. Tantra views the action of the libido as the primal human and natural urge. So sex becomes the ground base; sex is step one; and if you miss step one you miss it all. Where religion tends to wedge in conflict and dichotomy, Tantra rather seeks to cordalize polarities. Tantra is the place where divisions are healed; where two become one. This is clearly espoused in the Indian linga-yoni motif that signifies universal unity. More literal themes may, again, be seen in the Buddha protected by the Naga and in the candidly erotic Maithuna icon where man and woman – yogin and yogini – are conjoined in mystical-erotic embrace.

Now, it needs to be restated and boldly underscored that in the remotely pre-Tantric time of the Buddha, Tantra held a very different set of meanings. In its earliest usage it is interesting to note that Tantra signified the gentle pull and stretch of the tendons. Tendons are, of course, those fine sinewy cords that firmly attach our muscles to a bone. And while derived etymologically from the Latin teneo, tendon is similarly linked to Sanskrit tantra. Poetically Tantra means "stretching the lute strings," the lyrical title of the present project.⁴⁹ After years of experience I've come to the conclusion that it's better to support people through their physical bodies; everything is stored there anyway. And though sex plays a very small role in Tantra; it is a very important role all the same. And presuming, if we may, that "we're all sexual beings," then sex is something that we need to face up to and not just bashfully sweep

⁴⁹ Compare. Latin teneo with English extend and with Vedic feminine form tanti, 'a string made of tendon', and with Sanskrit tantri (Thai, dontri), which means "music" with its clear allusion to "stretching the lute strings." Compare also Sanskrit sutra.

it beneath the rug. Sex-life is natural and can't be avoided, so it's better to be viewed in a life affirming way. By learning to harmonize sexual energy with a broader eyes-open sense of being, you can gain a vital force for health and contemplation. Throughout your day you can think of your body as the starting point of your meditation. Silently reflect, "*My body... my meditation....*" Contemplation of the corporal structure has always been the basis of Buddhist meditation.

Sex is a fundamental facet of life; it is similarly a cardinal aspect of yoga. Through the practice of yoga, erotic expression is transformed into a current of higher understanding.

18. Angirasa: the proto-tantric Buddha

And now for an even more compelling illustration of the tantrification of the Buddha sect, I will turn to the earliest Buddhist scriptures that depict the Buddha as Angirasa, the Master of kundalini.⁵⁰ Angirasa is a Sanskrit-Pali epithet applied now and then to Gautama the Buddha. It debuts in a highly intriguing scene from the early passages of the Vinaya-Pitaka. The Buddha is wandering alone through the countryside shortly after his eminent awakening. Night is drawing near and he needs a place to sleep. He asks the head of a hermitage for accommodation. The director agrees and gives him the key to the sauna, the only place available. And there, says the scripture, Angirasa spends the night in the yoga of psychic heat "with brilliant flames streaming forth from his body."⁵¹ Indeed, the Buddha generates so much heat

⁵⁰ While *angi* clearly means 'limb' or 'parts', the emotive sense of *rasa* courts interpretive flare. Broadly handled as 'essence, brilliance, fluid, semen, sap, living water – the ambrosial seed of Shiva himself', *rasa* finds its native soil in the heart of Indian aesthetic discourse on rhythm, beauty, time and taste as alludes to 'that which distinguishes a work of art from mere statement' (T. Merton, 1973: 396, n).

⁵¹ *Angato rasiyo samaranti*. See discussion in E.J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha*, 1927: 22.

that smoke starts spewing through the roof of the sauna while the resident hermits all rush out and remark to each other, "That shaman must have done himself in."

Not so. "At the end of the night" the text declares, "when the flames of kundalini were finally quenched, the multicoloured flames of Him of psychic power remained ever radiant: dark green, crimson, yellow, red and the colours of crystal all shone from Angirasa's body."⁵²

This legend offers two rich interpretive inferences. First of all, the Buddha was not yet finished with his psychic metamorphosis several weeks after his grand illumination. Second is the virtual attestation that the yoga technique of producing psychic heat (or kundalini tapas) is by no means a later baroque innovation. Though expressing itself in a very ill-defining and outmoded idiom, the Majjhima-nikaya describes nonetheless the heat (or tapas) obtained through the practice pranayama. And in this way the Buddha is made to explain, "As two big men might grab hold of a weaker one and hold him over a barbecue pit, when I finally stopped my kumbhaka practice a terrific heat arose in my body."⁵³ There is the passage in Dhammapada, as well, where the Buddha is describe as being "on fire,"⁵⁴ and another where the earnest

⁵² My interpretive translation of Majjhima-nikaya (The Book of Middle Length Sayings, trans. Horner, vol. I, 1954-9: 244). The text speaks clearly of the magical "heat" produced by holding the breath. Here we see the ancient and widespread notions of "magical sweating" and "inner light" found among various shamanic peoples. In the yogic traditions found in Tibet toumo (gtum-mo) is equivalent to "psychic heat." See I.B. Horner, trans., vol. 4, 1993, and Mahavagga, 1951: 35, n. See also Anguttara-nikaya (Gradual Sayings vol. III, trans, E.M. Hare, 1952: 175: "Lo! See Angirasa, illuminant / As the midday sun, all radiant." For the Buddha "burning." See also Eliade, Yoga: 331.

⁵³ I.B. Horner, The Collection of Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-nikaya), 1954-59: 1, 244.

⁵⁴ Cf. Mascaro, trans. The Dhammapada, verse 387.

bhikkshu is portrayed as "moving about like fire, burning all his fetters, large and small."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Verse 11. For more on the subject of 'psychic heat' or tapas, see N.J. Allen, "The Indo-European Prehistory of Yoga," 1998: 1-20. Allen approaches the subject of tapas from the standpoint of an 'Indo-European cultural comparativist.' He compares the heroic ordeals of Odysseus with ascetics from pre-historic Indian traditions. Hence when "he sleeps in his pile of leaves, the Greek hero is likened to a firebrand (dalon) carefully kept alight under a heap of ashes (5.487)." Allen then points to scriptural Svetambara Jain stories where a king that becomes an ascetic similarly "undertakes intense austerities and is likened to 'fire confined within a heap of ashes.' If accepted, writes Allen, "the rapprochement has bearing on the history of the notion of tapas (literally 'heat')", n. 12.

APPENDIX I: Forty-two Sanskrit definitions of "yoga" (both masculine and feminine)⁵⁶

- yoga: m. a yoke, team, vehicle, conveyance.
- yoga: m. (√1. yuj; f) the act of yoking, joining, attaching, harnessing, putting to (of horses)
- yoga: m. any junction, union, combination, contact with.
- yoga: m. employment, use, application, performance.
- yoga: m. equipping or arraying (of an army).
- yoga: m. fixing (of an arrow on the bow-string).
- yoga: m. putting on (of armour).
- yoga: m. a remedy, cure.
- yoga: m. a means, expedient, device, way, manner, method.
- yoga: m. a supernatural means, charm, incantation, magical art.
- yoga: m. a trick, stratagem, fraud, deceit. (cf. yoga-nanda).
- yoga: m. undertaking, business, work.
- yoga: m. acquisition, gain, profit, wealth, property.
- yoga: m. occasion, opportunity.
- yoga: m. mixing of various materials, mixture.
- yoga: m. occasion of, possessing.
- yoga: m. connection, relation; in consequence of, on account of, by reason of, according to, through.
- yoga: m. putting together, arrangement, disposition, regular succession.
- yoga: m. fitting together, fitness, propriety, suitability; suitably, fitly, duly, in the right manner.
- yoga: m. exertion, endeavour, zeal, diligence, industry, care, attention; strenuously, assiduously; pūrṇena yogena, with all one's powers, with overflowing zeal.
- yoga: m. application or concentration of the thoughts, abstract contemplation, meditation, (esp.) self-concentration, abstract meditation and mental abstraction practised as a system (as taught by Patanjali and called the Yoga philosophy; it is the second of the two Sāṃkhya systems, its chief aim being to teach the means by which the human spirit may attain complete union with Ishvara or the Supreme Spirit; in the practice of self-concentration it is closely connected with Buddhism.
- yoga: m. (in arithmetic) addition, sum, total Sūryas.
- yoga: m. (in gram.) the connection of words together, syntactical dependence of a word, construction; dependent on, ruled by.

⁵⁶ Monier Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European languages, revised by E. Leumann, C. Cappeller, et al., 1899.

yoga: m. any simple act or rite conducive to Yoga or abstract meditation.

yoga: m. Yoga personified (as the son of Dharma and Kriyā).

yoga: m. a follower of the Yoga system.

yoga: m. (in Sāmkhya) the union of soul with matter. (one of the 10 mūlika[^]rthās or radical facts) Tattvas.

yoga: m. (with Pāshupatas) the union of the individual soul with the universal soul with the universal soul.

yoga: m. (with Pājcarātras) devotion, pious seeking after God.

yoga: m. (with Jainas) contact or mixing with the outer world.

yoga: m. (in astron.) conjunction, lucky conjuncture.

yoga: m. a constellation, asterism (these, with the moon, are called cāndra-yogāh and are 13 in number; without the moon they are called kha-yogāh, or nābhasa-yogāh).

yoga: m. the leading or principal star of a lunar asterism.

yoga: m. name of a variable division of time (during which the joint motion in longitude of the sun and moon amounts to 13 degrees 20 minutes; there are 27 such Yogas beginning with Vishkambha and ending with Vaidhriti).

yoga: m. a combined or concentrated grammatical rule or aphorism. (cf. yoga-vibhāga).

yoga : the connection of a word with its root, original or etymological meaning.

yoga: m. a violator of confidence, spy.

yoga: m. name of a School. on the Parama[^]rthasāra.

yoga: m. partaking of, possessing.

yoga: m. (in gram.) the connection of words together, syntactical dependence of a word, construction, dependent on, ruled by.

yogā : f. name of a shakti.

yogā : f. of Pīvarī (daughter of the Pitris called Barhishads).

APPENDIX II: Sixty-three Pali words containing "yoga" (as derived from the Vedic stem yuj).⁵⁷

abhiyoga: practice, applying oneself to, practice, observance , higher practice; soothsayer.
abhiyogin: practitioner of abhiyoga. an augur, practiced.
addhayoga: "half-connected, half-build"
allikānuyoga: given to the attachment to sensual joys
anuyoga: application to meditation (bhāvanā); given to the attachment to senses, invitation, appeal, question
anuyogin: one who concentrates his attention; applies or practices [ānuyoga], [fr. anuyoga], who is devoted, applying oneself to, devoted to applying oneself to, devoted to (-- °) Dh 209 (atta° given to oneself, self -- concentrated).
anuyogavant: applying oneself to, full of application or zeal, devoted,
ārohanayogga:
āyoga: not finding/ somebody to toil or strive after / Āyoga [Sk. āyoga, of ā + yuj; cp. āyutta] -- 1. binding, bandage Vin ii.135; Vv 3341; VvA 142 (°paṭṭa). -- 2. yoke Dhs 1061 (avijj°), 1162. -- 3. ornament, decoration Nd1 226; J iii.447
ayogūla: relating to heat, the sacrifice, sacrificial fire, severe self-torture
candayogavasena:
catu-yoga: fettered by the four bonds
duppariyogāho:
gahasamāyoga:
jāgariyānuyoga: vigilance; practice of watchfulness.
kāmasukhallikānuyoga: attachment to worldly enjoyment; hedonism; devotion to the passions, to the pleasures of sense; Indulging in sensual pleasures
katayogga: well-practised, trained
nikkilesayoga: free of kilesa (stains, defilements, negative emotions), virtuous, healthy (yoga)
niyoga: close connection; command, order, necessity, "strictly speaking"
nuyoga: practice of descending in water, bathing
pariyogāhamāna:
pariyogāḷha: dived into, penetrated into, immersed in (dhamma); one who has penetrated into the Dhamma
Payoga: [Vedic prayoga, fr. pa+yuj, see payuñjati] undertaking, practice , effort 1. means, instrument 2. preparation, undertaking, occupation, exercise, business, action, practice

⁵⁷ The Pali-English Dicitonary, T.W. Rhys Davids, W. Stede, Pali Text Society, Chipstead, 1921-1925.

/ kaya-payoga, payoga the instrumentality or use of the body; payogaṅ karoti; to exert oneself; the instrumentality or use of; (the recipient of the gift)

payogatā: application (to)

payoge: ~ sati.

payogasiddhi: Title of a work, 'which concerns the sandhi of vowels' =sarisa (sadisa) cp. sarī-

payogatā: (upekkhā)

payoga: [in Sanskrit, a means, practice, delivery; payuñjati

pubbayogo: former connection," ie connection with a former body or deed, former action (and

its result) ; frequent in Buddhist Sanskrit as pūrvayoga (yoga=yuga; syn. with pūrva)

sabba (or sabbe) yogā [sabba/sabbe-yoga]: at Th 2, 4; 76; S i.213; DhA iii.

sāciyoga: crooked ways, insincerity. Close in meaning to sādḥaka: adj. effecting;

accomplishing. (nt.), a proof. teacher D i.102. Sāciyoga [saci + yoga; cp. Sk. saci

crooked] crooked ways, insincerity] / sāciyoga ([sāci] + [yoga committed]): m. efforts

to distort

sampayoga: conversational intercourse / [saṅ + payoga] union, association / talk,

conversation

samāyoga: [saṅ+āyoga]: combination, conjunction

saṅyoga: [fr. saṅ+yuj] 1. bond, fetter 2. union, association

saṅyoge: to kiss

sukh'āvippayogakāmatā: viz. muditā, soft-- heartedness, kindness, sympathy SnA 128

sukhallikānuvoga: [same in BSk.]; hedonism; indulgence, attachment to luxurious enjoyment;

opposite of the practice of bodily torture to gain self-purification

upayoga: connection / connection, combination; employment, application

upayogatthe: sampadāna: elation

upayogavacanaṅ: specialized yoga, technique, upaya, means to solve a problem.

uyyoga: energetic, departure, approach

vāta-yoga [iv. 345; J iv.430]: yoga direction of the wind J ii.11

viniyoga [vi+niyoga]: possession, application, use

vippayoga [vi+payoga]: wrong application, separation; separation from the beloved one

visaṅyoga (& visañña) [vi+saṅyoga]: disconnection, separation; disconnection with false doctrine;

visaṅyoga: iii.230 (kāma-- yoga°, bhava°, diṭṭhi°, avijjā

viyoga: [vi+yoga] separation; loss (of property); °mānana disrespect, °yoga separation, °raja faultless,

voyoga [vi+uyyoga in sense of uyyutta?]: effort

yāca: original; variant yājayoga is old & well established; cf. ti tassa tassa dānato yācanayogo

ti attho; yājayogo; yācanayogo ti attho; yājayogo ti pi pāṭho; yājana

yājayoga:

yoga: being connected with; devotion to, following another discipline; to make an effort, to struggle; to show earnest endeavour; sabba (blessing); nibbāna [same in Buddhist Sanskrit: yogakṣema]; a certain kind of house; union with the gods; a conjunction of the planets; ties; trained, serviceable; an astringent remedy; application to sensuous enjoyment; "former connection"; (human body), opposite dibba yoga; yoga: (bhava--yoga-- yutta āgāmī hoti, +kāma°); yoga: a āgāmī hoti, +kāma°); ogha+yoga: Pug 21 (avijjā°); Vism 211; There are 4 yogas, which are identical with the catūhi yogehi yutto lokasannivāso catu—yoga; an earnest student; kkhema [already Vedic yoga-- kṣema exertion & rest, acquisition]; vice, scheme; yogena practice of spells etc.; taking yoga in meaning of "charm, incantation"

yogāhitvā:

yogakkhemaṇ anuttaraṇ:

yogakkhemassa adhigamāya

yogakkhemin, ?

yoganīya: Yoganīya Yoganīya (adj.) [fr. yoga; grd. format] of the nature of / spelling is also yoganiya, cp. oghaniya.

yogāvacara: at one; one who fares by yoga

yogakṣema:

yogena: Yogena bodhaneyyā sattā bujjhanti ten

yoggaṇ: that which happens without a mo?? / Yogaṇ uggaṇhāti);-- divasa the day

yogga: a Yogga1 (nt.) [Vedic yogya; a grd. formation fr. yoga in meaning of "what may be yoked," i.e. yoggāni muñcati, to unharness the oxen; a contrivance; may be in meaning "train, practice"

yogin: Th 1, 947 (pubbake yogī "Saints of other days" Mrs. Rh. Davids); combined with

Yogāvacara Miln 366, 404; yogin: yoga, compare Classical Sanskrit [yogin]; applying oneself (to).

lakkha-yoggaṇ karoti to practise shooting

sukhaṇ anuyogo, aññataraṇ deva-- nikāyaṇ

yogā, gandhā, āsavā, oghā, sallā,

Yoggā kīḷanakāle vā tena, i.e. S

Yoge laddhe taṇ mantaṇ parivattetvā

Yoggaṇ dārukhaṇḍaṇ āsanaṇ. Bd

The four yogas, viz. kāma, bhava, diṭṭh, (rajā?)

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