

THE BEARING OF YOGA PRACTICES ON PSI RESEARCH

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RAO: I think the Yoga state has many similarities with other states of altered consciousness (obtained via drugs or hypnosis), but I would like to call your attention to some of the differences between these states and Yoga.

First of all, Yoga is essentially a *method*, not a state of consciousness. Whether altered states of consciousness occur during the practice of Yoga is a matter of opinion. Even though the Yogi is not looking for ESP, paranormal events still seem to occur. A difference that might be very significant for our research is that Yoga does not merely help us to reach certain altered states of consciousness, which may or may not occur, but that it prescribes a method that is very significantly related to the modus operandi of psi itself. There is nothing inherent in hypnosis that would facilitate ESP occurrences, and the same is true for drug-induced states. In contrast, in Yoga training there is a constant endeavor toward imaging, which in itself might entail the process of imaging extrasensory stimuli.

According to Yoga, the psyche (*chitta*) is ordinarily in a state of continuous fluctuation, caused by external stimuli and internal forces. Our perceptions, reason, and acquisition of information—be they true or illusory—are all produced by these fluctuations. Imagination, sleep, and memory are conceived of as experiences resulting from this psychic activity. But there is an independent power (*sakti*) stored in the psyche which cannot function unless these fluctuations are controlled. Yoga formulates a psychophysiological method in eight stages to help restrict these fluctuations.¹

Stages I and II (*yama* and *niyama*) are purely preparatory and deal with moral commandments of proper behavior. Stages III and IV

(*asana* and *pranayama*) are concerned with physical exercises to help the individual achieve control over some of his physiological functions.

The need for these ethical and physiological practices is easy to understand: desires and sensory indulgence encourage further involvement in sensory processes, resulting in increased fluctuations of the psyche, which is precisely what Yoga seeks to control. The physical exercises also help to reduce sensory input and to achieve control of the nervous system.

Stage V, a state of introspection (*pratyahara*), is quite important, as it represents the link between physiological and psychological exercises. By introspection the Yogi is able to regulate his body to suit the requirements of his mental states. My guess is that this stage enables the Yogi to select specific experiences and reproduce them later at will.

In stage VI, a state of concentration (*dharana*), control is finally obtained over the fluctuations of the psyche. In this state there is intensification of the activity of the mind in one direction: the focus of attention is narrowed. This focus is expanded when entering the next stage of meditation (*dhyana*), VII. In this stage the Yogi attempts to extend concentration and to fix his attention on an object for any length of time. If this state is achieved, the psyche can enter the final stage, VIII, a standstill state (*samadhi*), in which the mind becomes one with the object of concentration.

There are three important implications for parapsychology in Yoga teaching. First, there is inhibition of cerebral activity in the stage of physical exercise. Second, there is activation of the psyche in the state of concentration. Third, the expansion of concentration sought in the final stages reverses the role of the psyche from one of receiving impressions through the senses to one of entering into direct relation to external objects. If your mind is set on another individual, you might obtain telepathy. Another point relevant for parapsychology is that Yoga concentration in its early phases generates hallucinatory imagery similar to that obtained under hypnosis. The *modus operandi* involved in creating hallucinations and in receiving extrasensory perceptions might be similar even though the sources may be different.

At Andhra University we are investigating whether there is anything inherent in this process of imaging, which could be relevant to ESP. We feel it is premature to attempt testing Yogis for their psi ability. Apart from the numerous difficulties involved in finding Yogis and in working with them, we could hardly expect to understand the processes underlying psi induction without first obtaining an introspective appreciation of Yoga practices. Consider, for instance, the transcendental experiences: it

is very difficult for me to think of anything without time and space. Even if you succeed in entering such a state you are not able to express it verbally. Therefore, we think that it is essential that the investigators themselves go through these practices to be able to faithfully report what happens when they themselves concentrate. Only after such preparation can one hope to be able to communicate with real Yogis and to obtain firsthand information. I think that Yoga methodology could find its place along with drugs and hypnosis in parapsychological investigation.

SERVADIO: I would like to make a few comments, as I have been interested in Yoga for some time.^{2,3} In my opinion, the great difficulty in putting into practice what you suggested is that in the West there are very few people who are in a position to practice or teach serious Yoga; most Westerners turn to Yoga for neurotic reasons. On the other hand, I am convinced that there is a great deal of truth in what you said: the Yoga system, properly applied, could teach us a great deal.

AARONSON: As a side effect of the psychedelic movement in the United States, there is a tremendous interest in Yoga.

SERVADIO: There you are!

PAHNKE: Dr. Rao, do you actually have highly trained Yogis who would cooperate with you?

RAO: Right now we are not working with highly trained Yogis (who are very difficult to find, by the way). Nor do we intend to do so until we know more about the Yoga states. We are trying to explore these states, and to determine what questions to ask these people in order to assess their degree of Yoga development. Presently, we don't have any scale to help us understand how advanced a particular Yogi is. We depend on what he says, and on how long he has been practicing.

REFERENCES

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2. SERVADIO, E.: "Yoga and Western Thought," *Tomorrow*, 4, No. 1 (1955/56), 25-30.
3. SERVADIO, E.: "A Psychodynamic Approach to Yoga Experience," *Int. J. Parapsychol.*, 8, No. 2 (1966), 181-191.