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The History of Yoga

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VEDIC PERIOD

The actual word "yoga" surfaced around 1500 B.C.E., just as the Harappan civilization began to decline. The Harrapans' rather rapid demise was helped along, some scholars believe, by an invasion of Aryan barbarians. These nomadic invaders had no use for the sophisticated urban civilization the Harappans had built and took little time destroying it. They brought with them Brahmanism, a complex religious tradition based on sacrifice and ritual that formed the basis of modern-day Hinduism, and introduced the concept of yoga. The sacred scriptures of Brahmanism, known as the *Vedas*, contain a mixture of incantations and instructions in both poetry and prose. The first three books, *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, and *Yajur Veda*, were used exclusively by the priestly class of Brahmins; a later, fourth book called *Atharva Veda* provided householders with spells and incantations for everyday living.

Scholars have a hard time pinpointing the inception of the *Vedas*, but they generally agree that the scriptures date back at least 3,500 years. The word yoga has its first mention in the *Rig Veda*, the oldest of the sacred texts. This Vedic book, a collection of hymns or mantras, defines yoga as "yoking" or "discipline," but offers no accompanying systematic practice. The term yoga turns up again in the *Atharva Veda,* most particularly in the fifteenth book (*Vratya Kanda*). Again it refers only to a means of harnessing or yoking. But this time it's the breath that needs controlling. The *Vratya Kanda* introduces a group of men, the *vratyas*, quite possibly fertility priests, who worshipped Rudra, the god of the wind. Considered horrible outcasts by traditional Brahmins, these vratyas composed and performed songs and melodies. They found they could sing their songs a lot better—and probably hold the notes longer—if they practiced what they called pranayama, a type of breath control.

This, then, is the very beginning of yoga as we know it, the first mention of a physical action as part of a discipline or practice. Roughly 800 years will pass before history yields more information on yoga's development.

PRECLASSICAL YOGA

Little more than a noun and a nascent discipline in the *Vedas*, yoga played a more prominent role in the *Upanishads*, the sacred revelations of ancient Hinduism. The earliest of these teachings date back to at least 800 to 500 B.C.E. The word *Upanishads* combines the verb "shad," which means to sit, with "upa" meaning near, and "ni" meaning down, which suggests that the only way a student could learn the truths hidden in these revelations was to sit at the foot of his guru or teacher. The *Upanishads* contained little that we would call yoga asana practice. Instead, yoga referred in a more general way to a discipline used or path taken to achieve liberation from suffering. Two yoga disciplines in particular gained prominence during this time: *karma yoga*, the path of action or ritual, and *jnana yoga*, the path of knowledge or intense study of scripture. Both paths led to liberation or enlightenment.

The secret teachings of the *Upanishads* differ in important ways from their Vedic parent texts. The *Vedas* taught the fine art of sacrifice—external offerings to the gods in exchange for a peaceful and fruitful life. This form of karma yoga included specific rituals and sacrifices humans had to perform in order to appease the gods and be free from suffering. The *Upanishads* also espoused sacrifice as a means to liberation, but chose an internal, more mystical expression of that sacrifice. Gurus taught that the Self or ego (not an animal or crops) must be sacrificed in order to attain liberation. The means to do that, these revelations showed, came not through action or ritual, but through knowledge and wisdom (jnana yoga).

The *Upanishads*, as a whole, concentrated on these basic truths:
• Your true essence (the Self with a capital "S") is the same as the essence of the universe, or brahman. That essence—what we might think of as the soul—is called *Atman*.
• Everyone is subject to birth, death, and rebirth.
• Your actions in this lifetime determine the nature of your rebirth (the doctrine of karma). This understanding of karma says that if you perform good deeds throughout your life, you'll be reborn into the womb of a woman from a high caste; if you do evil, you're likely to find yourself in the lowly womb of a pig, or a dog, or, perhaps worse, an outcast.

• You can reverse the effects of bad karma through specific spiritual practices (i.e., internal sacrifices) like meditation and renunciation. Renunciation allows you to offer up the fruits of your actions and to renounce any actions fueled by desire or passion. In much later *Upanishads*, yoga became known as the path of renunciation (*samnyasa*).

One of the earliest *Upanishads* to teach specific yoga meditation practices was the *Maitrayaniya Upanishad* from the second or third century B.C.E. This Upanishad defined yoga as a means of binding the breath and the mind using the syllable Om. According to its author, "The oneness of the breath and mind, and likewise of the senses, and the relinquishment of all conditions of existence—this is designated as yoga." The Maitrayaniya took the concept of yoga a step further by presenting an actual method or discipline for joining or yoking the universal brahman with the Atman within all beings. This six-fold yoga path includes controlling the breath (*pranayama*), withdrawing the senses (*pratyahara*), meditation (*dhyana*), concentration (*dharana*), contemplation (*tarka*), and absorption (*samadhi*). Elements of this six-fold path expanded somewhat, and would resurface in the second century C.E., in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*.

The vibrational power of sound, as exemplified in the primordial word Om, came to signify the inner meaning of a yogi's actions, and speech enabled the yogi to express that meaning. Today, as in the days of the *Upanishads*, the guru's words impart wisdom to his students and, for the more devotionally adept, chanting the name of a god or goddess remains a powerful vehicle for transformation.

The *Bhagavad Gita*

The most famous—and most beloved—of all yoga texts, the *Bhagavad Gita* ("The Lord's Song") has its roots in the mystical, revelatory literature of the *Upanishads*. No one knows for sure how old this scripture is—it quite possibly dates from the third century B.C.E.—but we do know that it provides the most comprehensive description of yoga at that time. Later folded into the canon of the Mahabharata, India's well-known epic tale, the *Gita* brought together moral teachings and mystical lore as Lord Krishna instructed his pupil Arjuna on the ways of the world. While the *Maitrayaniya Upanishad* outlined a six-fold path to liberation, the *Gita* advocated a three-pronged approach: karma yoga, the path of service; jnana yoga, the path of wisdom or knowledge; and *bhakti yoga*, the path of devotion.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, jnana yoga signified meditation, or the path of wisdom, much as it did in the *Upanishads*. Using this type of yoga, a practitioner would try to discriminate between real and unreal, in an attempt to separate the Self from the non-Self. Karma yoga of the *Gita* was still a yogi's path of action, what Krishna called Arjuna's *sva-dharma*. As a warrior, Arjuna's obligation (his dharma) is to fight against the forces of evil, no matter what. And if he were to decide he doesn't like fighting, could he sell his wares in the marketplace instead? He can't, Krishna tells him. He's not a member of the merchant class, and he has no right to perform someone else's duties. In fact, doing one's duty poorly accumulates better karma than doing someone else's well. What if Arjuna knows the battle he's engaged in is wrong? It doesn't matter, says Krishna. The outcome of the battle makes no difference; it's Arjuna's duty to fight no matter what. He must practice what the *Gita* called *buddhi yoga*.

Buddhi yoga, the *Bhagavad Gita*'s melding of karma (action) and jnana (knowledge) yoga principles, taught that the yogi must never be attached to the outcome of his actions. What mattered was not whether Arjuna won or lost in battle, only that he perform his duty (his sva-dharma) and then offer up the fruits of his actions to Krishna, his Lord. In this way, Arjuna's sva-dharma became a form of internal sacrifice.

The *Gita* dedicated most of its later chapters to bhakti yoga, the path of devotion, most particularly devotion to Krishna himself. While a yogi could achieve liberation through what the *Gita* called "disinterested action," he attained an even higher state of awakening by worshipping Krishna.

The *Upanishads* The concept of universal consciousness, or brahman, developed out of the metaphysical teachings of the *Upanishads*. Yoga has lots of names for it: Atman, the transcendental Self, the Divine, *isvara*, *purusha*, pure awareness, the seer, the witness, and the knower are but a few of the more popular ones. At this point in preclassical yoga, everything resided within this consciousness and nothing existed outside of it. It was both the seer and the seen, and even the act of seeing. Purusha, the *Upanishads* taught, was all-knowing, pure, male, and infinite. Some schools of yoga and Hindu philosophy taught that this universal consciousness manifested itself in everything, beginning with the grossest, most visible realm of the five *bhutas* (air, fire, water, earth, and ether) and moving into the subtlest realm of the soul or Atman.

Toward the middle of the preclassical period, a rather radical metaphysical school called Samkhya surfaced. Although not a school of yogic thought, per se, this parallel tradition—which existed anywhere between 400 and 200 B.C.E. and owed its teachings to an obscure sage named Kapila—developed the basis for a more modern yogic world view. What made Samkhya so radical? Certainly not its tenet that yogis must renounce the world in order to transcend it and be relieved of their suffering. The concept of samnyasa (renunciation) is as ancient as the earliest *Upanishads*. By the time

Samkhya elevated this well-established concept, mainstream yoga philosophy felt that renunciation alone was not enough. Yogis had to practice karma yoga (the path of action) and jnana yoga (knowledge or meditation) to achieve true liberation. Samkhya became radical when it taught that the visible world was not a manifestation of the Divine. According to Kapila, nature and, in fact, all of creation was separate and distinct from the universal consciousness, although the manifest world could be illuminated by purusha. Suffering, according to the Samkhya tradition, occurred when the yogi became attached to things that were not the Self, and when he mistakenly identified those things with pure consciousness (purusha). Although this dualistic, rather heretical teaching failed the test of time, the Samkhya tradition created a sophisticated cosmology that explains the difference between the seer (purusha) and that which is seen. Subsequent schools of yoga rejected the Samkhyan's dualistic view of suffering, but borrowed its larger world view, which goes something like this:

There are two separate forms of reality or existence—purusha (the pure, transcendental spirit, which is male) and prakriti (matter or nature, which is female). Purusha is all-knowing, without beginning and without end. It has no characteristics and is completely immobile. It simply exists as pure consciousness. It is the seer. Prakriti, on the other hand, is in constant motion, creative, active, distinct, but unconscious. She is all that is seen. She has, in fact, created everything in the universe by manifesting herself in three ways: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. These three manifestations of her nature are called *gunas*. They exist simultaneously, but in varying degrees of prominence, in everything in the cosmos. Prakriti dynamically creates these phenomena; purusha passively illuminates them.

- **Sattva** is the guna of the mind and the cognitive senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin). The mind coordinates all biological and psychic activities and the cognitive senses keep us connected to the external world.
- **Rajas** is the guna of gross motor responses and physical experience. When this guna predominates, the senses of yearning—the voice, hands, feet, anus, and genitals—become active. Rajas makes physical experience possible, and controls the activity of the body.
- **Tamas** is the guna of darkness and inertia. When this guna predominates, the five subtle elements become active—these are the potential of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, which give rise to the structure of existence.

In the early Samkhya system, the gunas were neutral manifestations of prakriti; only later did they become aligned with certain qualities. The *Bhagavad Gita* also taught that the gunas came from nature, but believed that their existence bound humans to a particular body. Sattva, for example, denoted goodness and pure essence. The *Bhagavad Gita* taught that a sattvic nature was illuminating and "immaculate." The downside of having a sattvic nature was that a yogi could too easily become attached to the joyful feelings it produced. Being rajasic, in the *Gita*, meant he was bound by and attached to action. Rajas energy is dynamic, passionate. Later *Upanishads* translated rajas to mean greed, lustfulness, desire, possessiveness, passion, and clinging to material goods. Tamas became known as an obstacle that would bind a yogi to a life of sloth, heedlessness, and despondency. Its energy is heavy, slow, and thick. These gunas appear later on in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*.

Samkyhan philosophers believed that the only way out of this erroneous attachment to objects and desires was for the yogi to renounce the world completely. Through renunciation, the yogi could experience universal consciousness (purusha) and foreswear the natural world.

CLASSICAL YOGA

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* The most famous proponent of the Samkhya world view was an enigmatic philosopher/writer known only as Patanjali. Nearly every yoga teacher today is familiar with his treatise, the *Yoga Sutra*, which is considered to be the first systematic presentation of yoga, and reveres its author as the father of modern yoga. Today, no one really knows who Patanjali was, although speculation varies widely. Was he a simple grammarian, a teacher of Samkhya philosophy, or an incarnation of Shesha, the thousand-headed ruler of serpents? Whoever else he was and whatever else he did, Patanjali clearly succeeded in codifying the concepts of an ancient, oral tradition. His collection of 195 sutras (aphorisms or "terse statements") compiled most probably in the second century c.e., provides the first practical treatise on daily living, beginning with how to conduct oneself in society and culminating in the act of final liberation or enlightenment. Because Patanjali believed one could attain final liberation only with the help of a guru, these aphorisms are not really a self-help guide. They exist to assist the guru in his teachings.

Like the followers of Samkhya before him, Patanjali embraced a dualistic view of existence. On the one hand, he taught, there is purusha, the all-present, all-knowing ethereal consciousness, made up of countless Atmans, who watch as the cosmos unfolds before them. Male, formless and unmanifest, Purusha attaches to nothing; immobile yet pervasive, he simply sees all and knows all. Prakriti, on the other hand, is nature incarnate. Female, visible, and dynamic, prakriti constantly moves, creating and changing as she goes. She is all that is manifest in the world. Existing only to serve purusha, prakriti is unconscious and insentient. Nature exists, according to Patanjali and the Samkhyan philosophers, through a complex interplay among the three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—which are visible aspects of her character. Much like in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Patanjali aligned these gunas with specific characteristics in humans. When

the element sattva presents itself, according to this philosophy, the energy is light, clear, and joyous; a predominance of rajas produces passionate feelings, desire, and even greed, as one becomes attached to worldly goods; when tamas gets the upper hand, it brings energy that is slow, heavy, and thick, and can bind a person to a life of sloth and despondency.

Like the Samkhya philosophers, Patanjali believed suffering resulted when humans become attached to external phenomena, when they hold on to the fruits of their actions or when their desires (all the shoulds, wants, and needs in life) pull them away from their connection to a higher consciousness. Patanjali thought that conflict among the three gunas, each vying for dominance, was at the heart of human suffering. Sattva may bring feelings of joyfulness, he reasoned, but being attached to those feelings is no better than holding on to the greed of rajas or being stuck in the despondency of tamas. Much like the *Bhagavad Gita*—and diametrically opposed to the renunciation espoused in Samkhya—Patanjali wrote that only hard work (karma yoga) and deep meditation (jnana yoga) could relieve human suffering and lead to liberation. In fact, only through strict adherence to his eight-limbed path of yoga (*ashtanga yoga*) could a yogi tame the gunas and bring them back into balance, as they existed in primordial nature. Ultimately, said Patanjali, by releasing attachments to the natural world, a yogi could allow the transcendental quality of purusha to shine through his true Self.

Although yogis eventually rejected Patanjali's dualism entirely, they continued to use and expand upon his eight-limbed yoga path. This combination of practices still serves as a blueprint for living in the world and as a means of attaining enlightenment, although modern-day teachers no longer believe students must master the limbs in succession.

Patanjali's Kriya Yoga

Although he is best known as the chronicler of the eight-limbed yoga path, Patanjali also presented a version of *kriya yoga*, the path of transmutative action (i.e., the act of changing into a higher form) in his *Yoga Sutra*. Kriya yoga can best be described as a form of internal karma yoga. That is, by perfecting the niyamas or self-disciplines of Patanjali's eight-limbed path, particularly tapas (austerity), svadhyaya (self-study), and isvara pranidhana (devotion to the Lord), a yogi erases *samskara* (subliminal activators) from his subconscious. Samskara are like karma scars that result from good or bad behavior. They are indelible memories, imprinted on the subconscious, that propel the conscious mind to act; they are what dictate a person's birth, life experiences, and death. These activators cause the constant chatter or fluctuations in the mind that separate a person from purusha and make it impossible for him to experience it. An individual has good kinds of samskara and bad kinds, according to the *Yoga Sutra*. The bad kind keep the conscious mind actively seeking experience outside itself, regardless of whether that experience is pleasurable or painful. The good kind stop the conscious mind from seeking and attaching itself to external objects and senses. The resultant cessation (*nirodhah*) of vritti (fluctuations) and samskara brings true liberation.

THE POST-CLASSICAL ERA OF YOGA

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* defined yoga practice in the early part of the first millennium, and his eight-limbed path became a central aspect of the yoga systems that followed. The *Yoga Sutra*, however, was firmly rooted in the dualism of Samkhya philosophy, a school of thought that existed alongside the nondualistic Vedic and *Gita* traditions without ever supplanting them. Putting a precise date on the decline of classical yoga, as represented by Patanjali, and the subsequent start of the post-classical period is impossible, because the boundaries separating schools of yogic thought were remarkably fluid. Certain concepts and tenets from Patanjali and the early *Upanishads* continue unchanged or only slightly modified throughout the post-classical period as part of what might be called mainstream yoga. Upstart schools such as tantra or hatha yoga, which took exception to or radically departed from many of these older tenets, expanded the practice of yoga in often radical ways. The one thing both mainstream and new-age post-classical philosophers had in common was their rejection of Patanjali's dualistic world view. That marked the close of one era and the beginning of a new one.

Understanding the concepts of duality (*dvaita*) and nonduality (*advaita*) is no easy task, especially since they seem to have a lot in common. Both schools of thought believed in a universal consciousness that is formless, omnipresent, and immortal. Judeo-Christians call this the soul; for Patanjali it was purusha, and the nondualistic tradition of Advaita Vedanta called it Atman or Self. Although this Atman resides in each one of us, he (purusha may be formless, but he's still considered to be male) cannot be understood by the senses—he can't be seen, heard, smelled, touched, or tasted. Both schools understood that humans suffer when they become disconnected from this higher Self, and both believed that liberation comes when humans realize their true, transcendental Self.

For the dualist in preclassical and classical yoga, this suffering occurred when someone held onto and became subsumed by everything that was not the Self—in other words, when he came to believe that all he did, all his relationships, actions, feelings, thoughts, or motives made up his true Self. A person could free himself from suffering

only when he let go of his attachments to such things and realized—not with the intellect, but with the heart—that the transcendental Self resided within and that the Self was the ultimate reality. For the nondualist in pre- and post-classical yoga, suffering began when an individual tried to make a distinction between Self and no-Self; when he failed to understand that he was a small part of something much larger than himself; when he forgot that everything he did, all that he sensed, was simply a manifestation of the transcendental Atman or purusha. A nondualist released himself from suffering when he came to understand that his Self was not separate, but an integral part of the transcendental Self or Atman. Today, it might be easy to understand the difference between these philosophies if we paraphrase Shakespeare. For the dualist, "all the world's a stage" and the play prakriti (nature, primordial matter) puts on is for the benefit of purusha (universal consciousness, transcendental Self). The story is make-believe; the parts the actors play are not the same as the lives they lead; and the roles they take on are separate from who they really are. Obviously, to mistake the action on stage for real life would be confusing at best; knowing that the actor who plays Hamlet is in fact not Hamlet makes a world of difference.

The world's stage, for the nondualist, looks quite different. The play, while different than real life, is not separate from it. The play can't exist without the actors, who are real people, but playacting is only one aspect of who the actors are. The actors are real people; the roles they play, the script, the music are all contained within real life. Anyone who views the play as its own reality, separate from everything else, will get terribly confused.

It's somewhat easier to see the Divine in the mundane when you take the nondualistic view of reality, because the Divine is everywhere and in everything. When Atman or purusha is separate, how can anyone glimpse its luminous nature in everyday life? Patanjali never really answered that question, but later commentators explained that by practicing yoga (the eight-limbed path), the yogi attains the highest level of existence. At this point prakriti becomes so transparent and illuminating (sattvic) that purusha, the transcendental Self, shines through and reveals himself. The path toward true liberation lies in experiencing (not just believing) the universe as one. This combination of jnana yoga (yoga of wisdom and knowledge) and karma yoga (yoga of taking action) is similar to the ideas espoused in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The History of Tantra Yoga

Tantra emerged early in the post-classical period, around the fourth century c.e., but didn't reach its full flowering until 500 to 600 years later. This school represents a rather radical departure for yoga philosophy. In what could only have been understood as heresy, tantra rejected the *Vedas* (the most sacred texts of Hinduism since at least 1500 B.C.E.) as irrelevant. It refuted the notion that liberation could be attained only through rigorous asceticism and meditation, and it dismissed the Samkhyan precept that a yogi must renounce the world in order to free himself from it. Tantra also eschewed karma yoga (the path of action or service), choosing instead to focus on devotion (bhakti), most particularly worship of the Goddess.

In teaching about the causes of suffering and the path to liberation, tantra shares common ground with its ancestors. Like the nondualistic authors of the early *Upanishads*, tantric yogis believed that human suffering comes from the illusion of opposites, from the mistaken notion that the Self is somehow separate from the objects it desires. Being good nondualists, *tantrikas* (tantric yogis) see all possible sets of opposites, all dualities (good and evil, hot and cold, hard and soft, male and female) contained within the universal consciousness. The only way a yogi can liberate himself from suffering, according to tantra, is to unite all the opposites or dualities in his own body. Like Patanjali, tantrikas believe in the need to have a strong, pure physical body. While Patanjali may have acknowledged the need to strengthen and purify the body, he ultimately believed that the body was defiled and that a truly liberated yogi would shun the company of others for fear of becoming contaminated. Tantrika, on the other hand, celebrated the physical body, which they considered to be a sacred temple of the Divine, as a means to conquer death. The body became the vehicle for attaining liberation. In tantric yoga, the universal consciousness, which earlier philosophers called purusha, became Shiva and resided within the body. The principle of nature or creation, called prakriti in earlier yogic thought, became *shakti* and lived at the base of the spine. The ultimate unity—the male energy of Shiva with the feminine principle shakti—took place internally and led to final liberation or samadhi. Unlike the more traditional nondualists, however, tantrikas believed that the whole world was not an illusion, but a manifestation of the Divine and that all experience brought the practitioner closer to his or her own divinity.

Most Westerners equate tantra with kinky sex practices, and in one particular school of tantra uniting the male energy of Shiva with the feminine principle of shakti actually does lead to unusual sexual positions and wild orgiastic practices. The *vamamarga*, or left-handed path of tantra, employed traditionally forbidden pleasures, including sexual intercourse, to achieve samadhi. After all, they reasoned, how can an individual know what to transcend if he doesn't experience it first? The more conservative, right-handed tantrikas, on the other hand, weren't quite so literal. In fact vamamarga practices horrified them. They considered these practices dangerous, and preferred more symbolic means of uniting male and female energies. The right-handed tantrikas relied on arduous practices of asana, pranayama, mudras, and bandhas to awaken the female energy (shakti), draw it up through the body, and unite it with the male Shiva at the

crown of the head. Both types of tantra respected women far more than their yogic predecessors and most of their contemporaries, and revered the feminine deity (Shakti) as the necessary, active energy that made liberation possible.

Not everything in tantra broke with yogic tradition. Before a yogi could even begin tantric practices, he had to adhere strictly to the yamas and niyamas (ethical standards and moral disciplines) and the asanas and pranayamas as outlined in Patanjali's eight-limbed path in the *Yoga Sutra*. From there, the adept learned to concentrate (pratyahara) on a single point (ekagraha); for a tantrika, this point was an icon of a deity. Once he mastered pratyahara, he was ready to study visualization, which included feeling the deity's presence and summoning the sacred force of the deity in order to experience its divinity.

Similarly, tantra's use of mantras (sacred sounds) is as old as the Rig Veda, but tantrikas employed these sounds in a very different way. Each letter of the mantra (given to the student by his guru) corresponded to a place in the body and each place in the body represented a force in the universe. By chanting the mantra, the yogi could awaken the body and its corresponding universal forces. In order to practice this form of mantra meditation, the body must be pure and strong and the mind clear and alert.

Tantric yogis liked to use visual aids, such as mandalas, in their meditations. Generally made of wood, paper, or cloth, tantric mandalas were drawings of circles and geometric designs. Regardless of how simple or complex these drawings were, they always contained a seed or bindu at the center, which represented the union of the cosmos and the mind; concentric circles, which represented the various levels of existence; and a square "fence" around the circles, with open gates, to protect the sacred space. Ultimately, by meditating and visualizing, the tantrika entered into the mandala and realized that the unity of all things resided in him and that there was no separation between him and the Divine.

Hatha Yoga

Hatha yoga, out of which came the physical postures the Western world now embraces, first appeared in the ninth or tenth century. Despite its rather detailed and complex philosophic underpinnings, it was little more than a small and somewhat radical sect during the post-classical period. In fact, among some Hindus of the period, hatha yoga had the reputation of being nothing short of heretical in its focus on the physical and in its fascination with magical powers. Hatha yoga's principles arose from tantra, and incorporated elements of Buddhism, alchemy, and *Shaivism* (worship of the transcendental Shiva).

Like tantrikas, hatha yogis believed that creating polarities (male vs. female, hot vs. cold, happy vs. sad) caused suffering and brought about disease, delusion, and pain. The very name hatha yoga, a combination of "ha," meaning sun, and "tha," meaning moon, denotes the union of opposites. Hatha also means a force or determined effort, and yoga, of course, translates as yoke or joining together. Therefore, hatha yoga implies that it takes a lot of strength, discipline, and effort to unify opposing forces and to bring together the body and the mind. The biggest obstacles to practice for the hatha yogi include greed, hatred, delusion, egoism, and attachment.

Interested less in the sexual union of opposites than tantrikas, hatha yogis strove to transform the physical body into the subtle, divine body and thereby attain enlightenment. The transformed body was said to be impervious to disease, void of any defects, eternally youthful, and the bearer of paranormal, magical powers. Before hatha yoga students could even hope to accomplish such transformation, however, they had to learn an intricate physiology of the body, including the muscles, organs, chakras (energy channels), and tissues, and the gods that govern each. Hatha yogis also had to perform intense purification rituals before they could begin asana and pranayama practices. As with all yoga practice at the time, yoga students received instruction from their gurus.

Even though hatha yoga remained a somewhat marginal sect during the post-classical period, it produced an impressive number of treatises and prescriptive manuals. The first and primary text was written by a yogi named Goraksha, the person most often deemed the father of hatha yoga. Like most early gurus, Goraksha was a rather elusive figure. Quite possibly a member of the weaver caste in the Punjab, he probably lived in the ninth or tenth century c.e., although later hatha yoga texts also place him in the twelfth or thirteenth century. Goraksha founded the Natha sect of yogis and was considered by some to be a miracle worker, saint, and revered teacher. His earliest writing, the *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, introduces several important elements of hatha yoga, including the idea that the physical body is only one level of embodiment. There are five others, moving from the grossest (*garbha* or physical) body to the subtlest (*para* or transcendental) body. He also delineates nine energy channels or chakras, three signs or *lakshya* (literally, visions), and 16 props or *adhara*, upon which a yogi focuses attention (the ankle, the thumb, the thighs, the navel, etc.).

Svatmarama Yogin, who called himself a disciple of Goraksha (even though he came a few centuries later), wrote a second treatise, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, probably during the mid-fourteenth century. This text describes sixteen

postures, most of which are variations of Padmasana (the cross-legged Lotus pose), several purification rituals, eight pranayama techniques (primarily to retain the breath), and ten seals (mudras) with specific *bandhas*, or locks to constrict the flow of prana or life force. As Svatmarama explained, before the mind can even hope to control the senses, the breath must neutralize the mind. Steady, rhythmic breathing calms the mind, freeing it from external distractions; a calm mind in turn reins in the senses. Although decidedly nondualistic in nature, Svatmarama's six-limbed yoga path was exclusively for the attainment of samadhi through the practice of *raja yoga* (the yoga of Patanjali).

The *Gheranda Samhita*, a late-seventeenth-century manual based on the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, offers seven niyamas, or disciplines necessary for yoga practice: cleanliness, firmness, stability, constancy, lightness, perception, and nondefilement. The manual's author, the sage Gheranda, prescribes 32 asanas and 25 mudras. He also outlines an intricate purification system. But despite this emphasis on the physical body, Gheranda believed that a yogi attains liberation or ecstasy ultimately through the kindness of his guru.

Perhaps the most comprehensive—and the most democratic—treatise on hatha yoga, the *Shiva Samhita* may have been written toward the end of the post-classical period, as late as the early eighteenth century. It emphasizes that even a common householder (a common male householder, that is) can practice yoga and reap its benefits—a concept that would have startled earlier proponents of yoga. The *Shiva Samhita* outlines the intricacies of esoteric physiology, names 84 different asanas—the most wide-ranging list to date—and describes five specific types of prana (or life force), providing explicit techniques to regulate them. Unfortunately, only four of the asanas are described in detail. Just like all hatha yoga philosophy, the *Shiva Samhita* postulates that performing asanas will cure a yogi of all diseases and bestow upon him magical, superhuman powers.

The *Yoga Upanishads*

Despite their overriding popularity in the West today, both tantra and hatha yoga were considered radical departures from mainstream yoga, which was far more widespread and popular throughout the post-classical period. This more conservative strain of yoga incorporated much of preclassical yogic thought as well as Patanjali's eight-limbed yoga path, without, of course, his dualistic world view. Roughly two-thirds of the way through the post-classical period, a group of 21 secret teachings called the *Yoga Upanishads* surfaced. Most likely written between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries c.e., these sacred texts elaborated on particular practices of yoga, including a few asanas and some of the pranayama and mudras Western practitioners know today. Their emphasis, decidedly nondualistic in flavor, remained focused on the proper way to achieve liberation. Instructions on how to recite the sound Om show up in several of these texts; others demonstrate an elaborate means of breath control (pranayama); still others teach the student how to use inner sound (*hamsa*) to transport the self toward liberation.

One of the *Yoga Upanishads*, *Tejo Bindu Upanishad*, grafts seven new limbs onto Patanjali's eight-limbed yoga path. To the precepts and disciplines (yamas and niyamas), asana, pranayama, withdrawal (pratyahara), intense concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana), and liberation (samadhi) of the *Yoga Sutra*, the *Tejo Bindu* adds mula bandha (root locks), equilibrium, steadiness of vision, *tyaga* (abandonment), *mauna* (silence), *desha* (place), and *kala* (time). In a similar vein, other Upanishads offer additional yamas, niyamas, and asanas, provide bhutas or elements upon which to concentrate in pratyahara, and outline new methods to control the breath. The *Tri Shikhi Brahmana Upanishad* actually mentions 17 different asanas and details practices for purifying the channels (nadis) of the inner body, and for proper breath control (pranayama).

Much like Patanjali, the authors of the *Yoga Upanishads* saw many obstacles to practice, which could prevent a yogi from achieving samadhi. One text (the *Yoga Tattva Upanishad*) lists laziness, boastfulness, and sexual fantasies as impediments to liberation. It deems keeping bad company and becoming attached to the fruits of one's practice (i.e., enjoying the magical powers one attains) equally bad. The author of the *Tejo Bindu Upanishad* concurs, but can't help adding excessive sweating, absentmindedness, stupor, and being distracted to the list.

Yoga Comes West

The American brand of yoga we love today focuses primarily on the physical poses called asanas and is thus clearly an offshoot of hatha yoga, even though jnana yoga (the path of knowledge) and the raja yoga of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* were the first to gain currency in the West. Like Indian yogis, the first Westerners to encounter yoga were more interested in—and fascinated by—methods and practices that took them out of their bodies, transcending the physical to put them in closer touch with the absolute. According to yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein, the Western love affair with all things Eastern began in the third century b.c.e., once Alexander the Great's conquests opened up Persia and India. Even before that, Plato and Aristotle paid homage to Eastern philosophy in their writings.

Nearly 50 years before yoga landed on American shores, a group of Englishmen formed the Asiatic Society of Bengal

(in Calcutta) and took it upon themselves to study all things Indian. Their research and translations included essays on the *Vedas*, yoga, and the poetry of Shankara (800 c.e.). Society member Sir Charles Wilkins published the first English-language translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* in 1785, his colleague Sir William Jones weighed in with his own translations of the *Isha Upanishad* and a collection of hymns from the *Vedas*, and Henry Thomas Colebrooke wrote essays on the *Vedas* and on yoga, most particularly the *Samkhya Karika*, Ishvara Krishna's commentary on Samkhya.

The contemplative paths of yoga also resonated with a group of American intellectuals and self-described transcendentalists that included Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson and that drew inspiration from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Fifty years later, Madame Blavatsky, a Russian immigrant, occultist, and student of ancient India, established the Theosophical Society in New York City and in Europe. Her writings, most particularly *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), captivated her audience with the secrets of the ancient *Vedas*.

By 1893 Americans were sufficiently smitten by yoga exotica to embrace Swami Vivekananda, the first Indian spiritual teacher (and perhaps the first East Indian) they had ever seen. Vivekananda spoke passionately about raja yoga at the first Parliament of World Religions held that year in Chicago, and the crowd went wild. He lectured extensively for another two years before moving on to European cities and then returning to India. When he came back to the United States in 1899, he set up the New York Vedanta Society, a still-thriving community dedicated to four branches of yoga practice: bhakti (devotion), karma (service), jnana (knowledge), and raja (the eight-limbed path of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*).

About the same time, the Germans discovered the beauty of the Sanskrit language and the mystery of the *Vedas*. Although several scholars of the Romantic era welcomed the rich literature of India, Max Muller, comparative religions pioneer, most influenced Vedic scholarship and helped birth the flurry of European translations of ancient Indian texts that continued throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Among the greatest of these was the work of Johann Wilhelm Hauer, who, according to Feuerstein, was the first to study the vast history of the *Vedas*. He produced a translation of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* as well. Of course the English and the Germans weren't the only Europeans to gravitate toward yoga research. Feuerstein mentions Poul Tuxen, a Dutch scholar, who wrote a history of the yoga tradition in 1911. Twenty years later, Swedish researcher Sigurd Lindquist published two books on yoga, focusing on its psychological aspects, and by the 1940s, the Frenchman Jean Filliozat had added his translations of several works, and Italian scholar Giulio Cesare Evola his own writings on tantra yoga.

Yoga asanas gained a little more prominence in America around the turn of the twentieth century when hatha yoga adherents began to look more seriously at the physical benefits of their practice. Back in India, partly in an attempt to shore up hatha yoga's sagging popularity, Paramahansa Madhavadasaji encouraged local scientists and medical doctors to explore the physiological aspects of asana practice. One of his students, Kuvalayananda, established the first institute devoted solely to such exploration—the Kaivalyadhama Ashram and Research Institute in Pune, India. Madhavadasaji sent another of his adepts, Yogendra Mastamani, to the United States to set up the first American branch of the institute. Mastamani's connections with the Eclectic Physicians and Benedict Lust, the founder of naturopathy, gave yoga a foothold in the burgeoning holistic medicine practice of the day.

Up through the mid-1920s, Americans embraced a steady stream of Indian swamis coming to the West. But then in 1924, the federal government imposed a quota on Indian immigration. No longer able to bring their gurus stateside, Americans traveled to India to find them. Paul Brunton, a former writer and editor, discovered one of yoga's greatest teachers, Ramana Maharshi, and wrote *A Search in Secret India* in 1934, to introduce him to the world. Brunton went on to become one of the most prolific yoga chroniclers of his time.

J. Krishnamurti, an Indian philosopher, drew huge numbers of followers, beginning in the early 1930s and culminating at his death in 1986. For many baby boomers (as well as their parents), Krishnamurti epitomized the beauty and wisdom of jnana yoga, about which he so eloquently spoke, and his life and teachings influenced thousands of educators, philosophers, and laypeople. Besides embracing the spiritual side of yoga, Krishnamurti became an enthusiastic student of yoga asanas, spending many summers in Gstaad, Switzerland, with yoga master B.K.S. Iyengar and, later, with yogi T.K.V. Desikachar.

In 1947, Theos Bernard, another passionate student who studied in India for many years, wrote *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience*, one of the first guidebooks to yoga asanas. Indra Devi, after studying with yoga master T. Krishnamacharya in India, wrote how—to manuals and had scores of Americans bending and stretching to her guru's yoga. In 1950, Richard Hittleman, a spiritual disciple of Ramana Maharshi, began teaching the physical aspects of hatha yoga in New York City. By 1961, thanks to the power of television, Americans everywhere were learning a non-religious, decidedly unspiritual form of yoga exercise. The teacher was the same Hittleman, who hoped to convince these new converts that yoga meditation and philosophy could forever change their lives. His books, including *The Twenty-Eight-Day Yoga Plan*, sold millions of copies and put hatha yoga on the American map. Ten years later, yoga teacher Lilias Folan consummated America's love of this gentle physical form of yoga in her PBS-TV series

"Stretching with Lilias." Her openhearted, energetic manner convinced millions more that anyone could and should practice yoga. Today she has produced 11 yoga videos, which have sold more than 700,000 copies, and she continues to teach and lead workshops all over the world.

While America's World War II generation moved and stretched to the yoga of Richard and Lilias, the postwar baby boomers there and abroad yearned for a more spiritual awakening. These young college-age kids turned on and tuned in to Eastern spirituality in general and yoga principles in particular through *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramahansa Yogananda. Although written in 1946, this introduction to the power of yoga spoke to a generation of young people in the 1960s and '70s who wanted more spiritual and transcendental experiences than they could get in their local churches or synagogues. Many of these seekers incorporated asanas into their yoga practice, but their primary goal was enlightenment, not perfect alignment in Downward-Facing Dog. Many of these same novices embraced the teachings of another bhakti yogi, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, whose Transcendental Meditation enticed everyone from college freshmen to the Beatles, with its offer of experiences even more awesome than drug-enhanced trips.

Richard Alpert, a Harvard professor fired for his psychedelic experiments, found that a spiritual lifestyle could be even more powerful and life affirming than all his past acid-trips. He left for India in the late '60s and returned to America as Ram Dass, adept of Neem Karoli Baba. His book, *Be Here Now*, opened the eyes and hearts of many thousands of Western students. Ashrams and spiritual communities burgeoned during the '60s and '70s, and while some taught aspects of yoga asana and pranayama, the other paths—bhakti, jnana, and karma yoga—prevailed.

A Modern Spin on an Ancient Tradition

So how did yoga become the bending, stretching, twisting discipline we see today in yoga rooms and recreation centers around the world? How did the yoga canon expand from fewer than 100 postures—most of them variations on the seated lotus pose (Padmasana)—to more than a thousand, and come to include inversions, backbends, arm balances, and twists named after animals, gods, and myriad shapes? How did the ancient yogi's need to strengthen and purify his body translate to a current obsession with flat abdominals, toned biceps, and the latest in workout wear? Ironically enough, three Indian swamis in the early part of the twentieth century inadvertently fed this modern fascination with physical prowess by independently studying and expanding the hatha yoga repertoire and presenting it not only to the uninitiated layman, but to women as well. Swami Kuvalayananda focused primarily on the health benefits of practicing yoga; Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh and T. Krishnamacharya of Mysore concentrated on developing a richer, more varied system of asanas and pranayama techniques. Most scholars would agree that the hatha yoga Westerners enjoy today developed out of the work of these men.

T. Krishnamacharya

The man who deserves the most credit for creating, or at least influencing, the type of physical yoga that Americans, Western Europeans, and many Asians embrace today actually never set foot on Western soil. Sometime in the early 1930s, this young Indian man, Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, took it upon himself to champion the beauty and the benefits of yoga asana, lifting it up from relative obscurity and placing it alongside its bhakti, karma, and jnana yoga siblings. (In a biography, Krishnamacharya says asana practice was so little known in India that he had to go all the way to Tibet to find a guru to teach him.) Of course, like all serious yogis, his training began with Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, not with the study of postures; but then, he was only five years old when his father began teaching him in 1893.

No one really knows Krishnamacharya's true yoga journey, not even his family. Indeed his life remains shrouded in a fog of myth, fable, fact, and contradictory memories. Whatever the historical details, Krishnamacharya has become the undisputed father of modern-day hatha yoga. Since much of the Indian spiritual tradition has been handed down from guru to student for millennia, it's understandable that hatha yogis who teach the physical postures would want a similarly unbroken lineage. Unfortunately, no such lineage appears to exist. Whether it came from the *Yogarahasya*, an ancient text forever lost that appeared to Krishnamacharya in a dream, or from a palm-leaf manuscript called the Yoga Korunta, which was supposedly devoured by ants, or from an ingenious and dynamic blend of asana, pranayama, Indian wrestling, and British gymnastics techniques, Krishnamacharya's yoga represents a uniquely twentieth-century incarnation of a rich and ever-evolving tradition, the underlying tenets of which have wavered little since the time of the ancient Upanishads. We benefit from his knowledge every time we step onto a yoga mat in an Ashtanga, Iyengar, Bikram, or Viniyoga class (or just about any hybrid of them).

One old yoga text does appear to have influenced Krishnamacharya. The *Sritattvanidhi* has fairly recently emerged from the private library of the Maharaja of Mysore, India, where Krishnamacharya lived and taught. This treatise, which hails from the early nineteenth century, offers the first manual devoted entirely to the physical aspect of yoga. You'll find no breathing techniques, no bandhas or mudras to perform, no chakras to open, and no cleansing rituals to enact. With its 122 postures illustrated and named, the *Sritattvanidhi* expands the repertoire to include poses we've all grown to love—

handstands, arm balances, ashtangi foot-behind-the-head poses, and even rope hangings—and could very well be the proof yogis are looking for that a well-developed asana practice flourished prior to the twentieth century. That well-developed practice, however, incorporated much more than just traditional asanas. According to Norman Sjoman, Sanskrit scholar and author of *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace* (Adhinav, 1999), the *Sritattvanidhi* appears to have borrowed heavily from an assorted array of gymnastics moves, wrestling exercises, push-ups, and rope tricks, as well as yoga asanas. Sjoman says this eclecticism inspired and informed Krishnamacharya's teaching.

Krishnamacharya's work began in earnest in the 1930s when he received the financial backing of the Maharaja of Mysore, whose own ill health drew him to yoga. Krishnamacharya set up classes in a gymnasium at the Sanskrit College with the goal of introducing the power of yoga to as many students as possible. Like so many of today's yoga students, however, Krishnamacharya's students—mostly able-bodied, athletic, young men—were more interested in building strength and fitness and performing near impossible feats than in any spiritual dimensions of practice. So Krishnamacharya created sequences that focused on athleticism by incorporating the power of the breath and the element of meditative gaze (*drishti*) in a dynamic flow of poses called vinyasa, using all the props and disciplines at his disposal. To keep his students challenged and focused, Krishnamacharya developed increasingly more difficult sequences, allowing his students to progress to the next level only after they had mastered the first one.

Once he had developed and perfected his sequences, Krishnamacharya took his show on the road. He and his students demonstrated yoga asanas to appreciative audiences all over India. Understanding that his audience came from diverse backgrounds, Krishnamacharya tailored his yoga message to all beliefs and lifestyles, much as Western yoga teachers do today.

Three of Krishnamacharya's most famous pupils emerged from his years in Mysore—Pattabhi Jois, who went on to develop the school of Ashtanga vinyasa yoga, Indra Devi who became known as the "First Lady of Yoga" in America, and B.K.S. Iyengar, who created his own unique brand of asana practice, which is known for its attention to body alignment and for its extensive use of props.

Pattabhi Jois, who still teaches and practices in Mysore, was just a young boy when he met Krishnamacharya at one of his yoga demonstrations. Jois studied with Krishnamacharya for several years before leaving for college. Guru and student reunited in Mysore at the Sanskrit College, and Jois became a faithful follower of Krishnamacharya's methods. Jois credits his teacher with perfecting the Ashtanga vinyasa system, a tradition that he says draws inspiration from the classics—the *Yoga Sutra*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*—as well as from modern Western disciplines. This rigorous system of asana flow (vinyasa)—perhaps the most physically demanding sadhana in the West—resonates with Western practitioners who "go for the burn." At least initially, many embrace Ashtanga's emphasis on strength, flexibility, and stamina, and pay little attention to its other benefits. Just as Krishnamacharya did in Mysore, Pattabhi Jois and his disciples continue to teach a set sequence of poses (linked by the breath), the purpose of which is to create tapas, or heat in the body, in order to cleanse and purify. Many teachers in the United States and Europe, who receive inspiration and teachings from Pattabhi Jois, travel frequently to India for further study with him. Although very few teachers receive actual certification from Jois, many of them reap the benefits of his legacy. Ashtanga-style classes vary from first-series, the beginning level, which focuses on forward bends, to second, third, or fourth-series classes, which offer increasingly more difficult backbends, standing poses, twists, and arm balances. All classes include a vinyasa of Sun Salutations (Surya Namaskar), in which students jump from one pose to the next as a way of linking a variety of asanas together. Just like in the practice of yoga in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, combining the physical poses with attention to the breath brings the modern-day ashtangi steadiness and ease in the body, increased awareness in the mind, and more openness in the heart.

Indra Devi. In keeping with the long-standing yoga tradition of teaching only the initiated, Krishnamacharya never thought to include women or foreigners in his classes. Unfortunately for him, the Mysore royal family insisted that he teach a dear friend of the court, Zhenia Lubunskaia, known today as Indra Devi, who was both a woman and a Latvian. Reluctantly, Krishnamacharya agreed. He figured he would just need to push her beyond her capabilities and break her resolve, and then she'd go away. But Lubunskaia persisted, and eventually she not only became an accomplished yoga teacher, but a good friend as well. As Indra Devi, she introduced yoga to the Soviet Union and, in 1947, arrived in Hollywood where she taught such celebrities as Gloria Swanson, Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe, and Robert Ryan. Mataji, as her followers affectionately call her, culled a gentler system of yoga from her studies with Krishnamacharya. Her Sai Yoga is not a vinyasa flow. She still used the breath to move within the pose and between poses, but her characteristic trademark is more devotional in flavor. She added chanting and meditation or prayer during each class and offered a central asana on which to focus. Mataji, who has six yoga schools in Buenos Aires, Argentina, stopped teaching just a few years before her death in 2002. She was 102. Her yoga method continues to be a strong influence on yoga students throughout the world. She has trained literally hundreds of teachers through her four-year, college-level course of study.

B.K.S. Iyengar did not have an easy time being Krishnamacharya's disciple, although he continues to revere his guru.

Unlike Pattabhi Jois and Indra Devi, Iyengar didn't exactly seek out Krishnamacharya as a teacher, nor does he look back on his student days with much affection. Iyengar grew up in Krishnamacharya's household as his brother-in-law-a scrawny, sickly child who, by all odds, had very little chance of ever becoming a yogi. Instead, his duties were relegated to tending the gardens and performing the chores Krishnamacharya assigned to him. When Krishnamacharya's star pupil vanished from the household only days before an important asana demonstration, Krishnamacharya had no choice but to teach this puny pupil in hopes he would rise to the occasion. And rise he did—Iyengar not only performed very difficult asanas admirably at the demonstration, but he went on to assist Krishnamacharya in his classes and other demonstrations throughout the area. His brief tenure with this "harsh taskmaster" ended when Krishnamacharya asked him to take over a women-only class in the northern province of Karnataka Pradesh—not exactly a plum assignment—which Iyengar agreed to do. From that point on he remained, happily it seems, hundreds of miles away from his guru.

Partly because of this distance, Iyengar had to explore Krishnamacharya's poses on his own. He used his own body as his laboratory, concentrating on precision and internal and external alignment, as he tried to figure out what effects a pose had on the internal organs as well as the skeletal system. Once Iyengar clearly understood the way an asana worked, he would then modify it to fit his students' bodies and health concerns. Just as Krishnamacharya adapted his sequences to the competitive nature of his able-bodied young athletes, Iyengar customized the poses, and even offered props for his less flexible, older clientele. And, as the aged and infirmed among them began seeking help for their maladies, Iyengar rose to the challenge, creating healing, therapeutic sequences.

This emphasis on the physical body became a signature of Iyengar Yoga, and Iyengar's intuitive, almost uncanny ability to heal through asana practice has become legendary. He views the body as a finely tuned, highly sensitive instrument whose vibrations, he says, "express the harmony or dissonance within it." Asanas, he believes, help the body create or re-create its innate harmony. When performed correctly, asana practice synchronizes the rhythms of the body's physical, physiological, psychological, and spiritual components. Unlike Krishnamacharya, Pattabhi Jois, and Indra Devi, Iyengar waits until the practitioner has mastered asanas before incorporating pranayama into his method. Nor does he link the poses together in the same way. He chooses poses that work together, but his concern is how they achieve balance within the body rather than how they link together. Iyengar continues to teach, along with his daughter Geeta and son Prasant, at his center in Pune, India. His followers have spread Iyengar Yoga all over the planet, creating the most well-known style in the world. Even those who teach other methods often credit the Iyengar method with instilling in them an understanding of the body, the architecture of the poses, and the means to modify asanas when necessary.

Each of Krishnamacharya's star pupils took from him important, but very different lessons. Pattabhi Jois received the vinyasa teachings and went on to spread the word, almost verbatim; Indra Devi gravitated toward his style of sequencing and enhanced those teachings with a more developed sense of devotion and meditation; and Iyengar learned the power of adapting and improvising to meet the needs of his students, a practice he continues today. But a fourth disciple experienced Krishnamacharya's teachings in a much different way. Krishnamacharya was older, more patient, and had continued to evolve his understanding of yoga asanas when his son T.K.V. Desikachar began to express interest in learning.

T.K.V. Desikachar. By the time Desikachar asked his father to teach him, Krishnamacharya's own work had changed, in much the same way as Iyengar's had. Yoga was no longer reserved only for the select few who were strong and flexible enough to withstand its challenges, or spiritually attuned enough to understand them. To survive as a teacher, Krishnamacharya found he had to open his doors to all kinds of students, including those with physical limitations and even non-Hindus. And then he needed to figure out how to teach them. Working one-on-one, Krishnamacharya devised specific practices for each student. Sometimes he varied the pose sequence, or the length and frequency of the breath; other times he modified or simplified the poses to achieve particular goals. As the student reached those benchmarks, Krishnamacharya would alter his or her "prescription" to enable the student to grow further in the practice and to introduce the spiritual aspects of the tradition. This technique laid the groundwork for Desikachar's own interpretation of Krishnamacharya's work, which he called Viniyoga.

Desikachar was already a grown man, having finished college with an engineering degree, when he decided to devote his life to studying yoga. Apparently he saw his father—the ever-proper Brahmin—hug a woman who had come to thank him for curing her insomnia. Whether Desikachar was more shocked by the woman's response or intrigued by his father's ability to heal her, he knew he wanted to learn more. Krishnamacharya's response to his son's change of heart echoed his reaction to Indra Devi and Iyengar's desire to learn—it annoyed him more than it pleased him. To test Desikachar's resolve, his father began his lessons at 3:30 a.m. seven days a week. He agreed to focus only on asanas and pranayama since Desikachar disavowed any interest in God. Desikachar continued his yoga studies for 28 years, finally understanding, and incorporating, yoga's inherent spiritual dimension.

While he was teaching his son, Krishnamacharya continued to refine his system and developed it into an individualized program of asana, pranayama, and devotional chanting. He created programs for the young, the middle aged, and the

elderly. Your youth, Krishnamacharya reasoned, is the time to strengthen your muscles and enhance your flexibility through increasingly challenging yoga sequences; as you mature into your career and family years, your yoga should keep you healthy and stress-free. In your later years, as your focus becomes more internal and your thoughts turn to God, your yoga should have a more spiritual dimension.

Desikachar has devoted his life to spreading Krishnamacharya's message of yoga to the West and increasing its connection to science and medicine. Like Iyengar, Desikachar's Viniyoga concentrates on tailoring the yoga sequences to the needs of the individual, and, like Pattabhi Jois, he emphasizes the power of the breath. However, Viniyoga's focus lies somewhere between Iyengar's precision and Pattabhi Jois's vigorous movements. A Viniyoga class is slower than Ashtanga, though it coordinates the breath with the movement. Like Iyengar Yoga, it is known for its therapeutic applications, though Viniyoga concentrates less on alignment and more on varying the length and tempo of the inhalations and exhalations. Although not yet as popular in the United States as Iyengar and Ashtanga Yoga, Viniyoga has touched the lives of countless practitioners all over the world.

Other Styles of Yoga. Several other yoga styles at least indirectly owe their allegiance to Krishnamacharya's legacy. The increasingly popular Bikram Yoga, created by Bikram Choudhury, the self-proclaimed "Yogi to the Stars," incorporates two pranayama techniques and 24 asanas, including backbends, standing poses, one-legged balances, and twists. A 100-degree, humid room—the signature trademark of Bikram Yoga—makes this style particularly challenging. Kripalu Yoga, originally developed by Amrit Desai, a disciple of Indian master Kripalvananda, a Kundalini yogi, shares its asana repertoire, breath work, and flowing style with Krishnamacharya's vinyasa system. Kripalu encourages its students to discover their own strengths and weaknesses and to "play with their edges," coming into and out of the poses as they need to. Once students become more advanced and learn to hold poses longer and longer, Kripalu Yoga encourages them to allow the poses to arise spontaneously as they work with their life force (prana) and create their own, unique practice.

Yogi Bhajan, a Sikh who immigrated to the United States in the 1960s, broke with tradition and introduced Kundalini Yoga to the masses. His type of Kundalini Yoga combines asana with breath work, chanting, and meditation to awaken the Divine energy coiled at the base of the spine. His Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO), established in 1969 and headquartered in New Mexico, focuses on karma yoga (the path of service to the community) as much as on education, a vegetarian lifestyle, and the therapeutic applications of yoga and ayurveda. Students who study Kundalini Yoga learn specific pranayama techniques designed to clear the nadis and energize the system.

Vanda Scaravelli, creator of the Scaravelli Method, discovered yoga rather late in life, after the sudden death of her husband. At 45 years of age, she plunged headlong into daily classes with Iyengar, who taught her for many years, and later with T.K.V. Desikachar who introduced the power of the breath. Her method of yoga, which she taught in Italy until she was well into her 80s, teaches the power of gravity and the freedom of the breath in asana. The popularity of her book, Awakening the Spine, and the hundreds of students currently trained in the Scaravelli method have allowed her style of yoga to live on in Europe, Canada, and America.