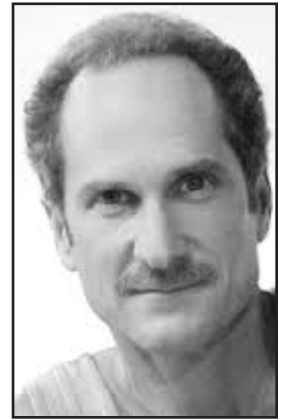


THE FOUR YOGAS by Ganga White

It usually isn't long after one begins the study of Yoga that a myriad of forms of Yoga are encountered. A few of the types are Hatha, Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, Kundalini, Kriya, Atma, Agni, Buddhi, Parama, Tantra, Laya and Mantra Yogas. This can all become quite confusing. The word Yoga means union, to unite or make whole. How has this science of re-integration itself becomes divided into so many seemingly conflicting parts? In order to understand this we must first look at a few of the major systems. Though there are many different systems or names of Yoga systems, many scholars agree that there are four or five major types of Yoga. These are often referred to as **The Four Yogas**. When analyzing just about any approach or brand of Yoga, one usually finds it made up of these major four. I will offer here a simple introduction to the big four and some of the strengths and possible pitfalls of each.



RAJA YOGA. Raja means king and Raja Yoga is known as the kingly Yoga. This Yoga is usually attributed to Patanjali who first codified this system, although he didn't call it Raja but simply a vision of Yoga. Patanjali's teachings are found in a treatise consisting of four volumes or books which go into analysis and explanation of psychology, the body, mind, psychic system and the cause and removal of suffering and delusion. His two most quoted sutras are "Yogas chitta vritti nirodaha," and yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi. They are translated in various ways, often with subtle but profound differences. The first, for example, as "Yoga is the stilling of turbulence in consciousness" or "Yoga is the control of the mental modifications." The second might be translated as Yoga consists of observances, purifications, posture, control of life force, turning the senses inward, concentration, meditation and super-consciousness or re-integration." These are usually seen as the eight limbs, or steps, of Yoga and hence this system is also called Ashtanga Yoga or eight limbed Yoga. Hatha Yoga is often included as part of Raja Yoga but many also see it as separate and complete.

One of the appealing things about Raja Yoga is also its very limitation. It appears to be a scientific, step-by-step path to truth or enlightenment. This makes it especially attractive to the western mind which seeks order and explanation for everything. It is the Yoga of control and what is more controlling than a king? Most interpretations of Raja Yoga emphasize controlling the mind, the senses, the life force, thought, breath and most other aspects of life. Hence when imbalanced it can become rigid and mechanical.

BHAKTI YOGA is the Yoga of devotion. It is the most like world religions in that it consists of prayer, singing, devotional practices, study of scriptures, remembrance of God, service and rituals. Bhakti Yoga is based on cultivating faith and its goal is total self-surrender to God. It acknowledges that our own mind and understanding are quite limited and therefore it behooves us to attune to and serve God or, for the less theistic person, the higher intelligence in the universe. Bhakti Yoga seeks to lead one to the bliss and ecstasy of oneness with God. It is the path of the heart but followed blindly or to extremes can lead to the ignorance of ritualism, emotionalism and mindlessness.

JNANA YOGA is the Yoga of wisdom. It is based on the study of oneself. Jnana Yoga suggests that the supreme in life, such as divine love, truth, or God-consciousness, cannot be cultivated. These non-things cannot be brought about by our little minds and actions. Rather they come into being when we remove the obstruction of our ignorance and illusions. In its purest, non-dualist form Jnana even denies that we are ever separate from God. It says that acts of worship or seeking of God in fact deny the oneness that already exists! A famous great Jnana Yoga saying is "Tat Twam Asi" or Thou Art That. This not only asserts oneness but carefully uses the word that which points to truth instead of naming or defining it.

Rather than being based on faith, Jnana Yoga encourages enquiry and questioning. It is the Yoga of Seeing and Being, asking us to look and discover rather than to follow and believe. Jnana Yoga has been called the pathless path. It endeavors to free one from conditioning and the limitations of knowledge. It shows us that when we open our eyes and begin to see the beauty and sacredness around us we do not need techniques, rituals or beliefs. We need to end our illusion and delusion. This happens through the awakening of perception and watchfulness in our daily life. But imbalanced Jnana can lead to intellectualism and dry, mental self-indulgence.

In doing the headstand Hatha Yogis learn to see things from a different perspective. Perhaps an upside down way of looking at the unity in Yoga could be that all paths are one because no path alone leads to truth. Therefore it is not a question of finding the right system or even the best one. What is important is realizing that no explanation or system can contain the wholeness of life.

KARMA YOGA is the Yoga of Action. We must act in the world and this Yoga seeks to bring awareness to our actions. It deals with both the quality and the motivation of action and might be called the Yoga of doing. We can learn to act with more clarity, completeness, beauty and meditation in action. Our businesses, our bodies, our relationships and even how we do the dishes, with right understanding, all become an expression of our Yoga. Our actions are the manifestation of our inner reality. As has been said, we can talk the talk but do we walk the walk?

Karma Yoga is the place where all Yoga systems can come together. No matter what one's point of view, when spiritual awareness awakens and the heart opens with love and compassion its expression is in sharing with others. A danger of Yoga, and of life itself, is self-centeredness. Most Yoga practices deal with improving our minds, bodies and hearts. So we must be vigilant about becoming preoccupied with ourselves. Yoga is something far deeper than developing the body beautiful or increasing one's bliss. Karma Yoga reminds us to think of and serve others, especially those who cannot help themselves—the very poor, sick or old. It asserts that “you are the world.”

To our unawakened eyes these systems may seem to contradict each other. Bhakti says have faith, Jnana says question everything. Raja says control your mind, Jnana says the controller is that which you are trying to control! But the problem is the medium, not the message. The limitation of the very structure of mind, thought and language create the division. When you explain that which can never be put into words, the closest you can get is paradox!

Perhaps the metaphor of a sage will help. He likened the four yogas to a bird. Raja Yoga is the tail, steering, steady-ing and guiding the bird with control. Bhakti and Karma, love-devotion and action are the wings propelling it onward. Jnana is the head, seeing and guiding the bird toward the light. Which part can you deny? Which can you deny and still fly?

To return to our question, what has created all this division in the science of oneness? Perhaps it is our very chattering mind. The first statement in the Tao te Ching says, “The Tao that is explained is not the Tao.” And, as ancient Yogis have said, “To define Truth is to deny it.” These great sayings point out that we must become aware of the limitation of words. As soon as you explain oneness your words become a viewpoint, one perspective, and not the whole.