

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF YOGA

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This summary of Yogic ideas and practices has three parts:

***Part I, The Principal Yogas;  
Part II, A Brief History of Yogic Thought and Practice; and  
Part III, Central Themes in Yogic and Hindu Psychology and Philosophy.***

Parts I and II include very brief comments on Hindu ideas since historically some definitive texts include both yogic and Hindu elements. I thought it useful to say something about their connections in order to provide some context for the understanding how the great diversity of yogic teachings came to pass.

## PART I: THE PRINCIPAL YOGAS

Part 1 is based on Haridas Chaudhari's *Integral Yoga*. I think his book is the best concise, readable introduction to the yogas that I know of, informed by Chaudhari's excellent education in Western philosophy as well as Indian traditions. Chaudhari, a student of Sri Aurobindo, was the founder of the California Institute of Integral Studies. As such, there is a section at the end on "Integral Yoga," which was Aurobindo's own attempt to synthesize essential elements from the various yogic traditions. This summary has ended up as a combination of Chaudhari's work, comments by some of my students, and my own additions and interpretations. If you want the untouched Chaudhari, his excellent book is published by Quest.

Yoga was developed by yogis, who had no necessary inherent connection with any particular religions tradition in India. In fact, some were active rebels against institutionalized religion (primarily Hindu) at certain points in Indian history.) It has at least as much in common with psychology, which did not exist in ancient India, scholarship, and disciplines of exercise than with any religion per se. The follower of any religion can productively practice one or more of the yogas, and some yogas are implicitly involved in a variety of religions (Taking just example, Bhakti is part of numerous very different religions.) To imagine that yoga is incompatible with any particular religion, or identical with Hinduism, is to

misunderstand it.

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**1. HATHA YOGA**, well known in the West, places its emphasis on the body/physical side of existence. It emphasizes the close interrelationship between body and mind. Hatha is derived from the roots:

Ha (sun) and tha (moon)

Hatha is the equalization and stabilization of the "sun breath" (breath which flows through the right nostril) and the "moon breath" (breath which flows through left nostril)

Hatha also means violence, force, power. In that sense it can be seen as the mind taking power over the body, in ways that in turn react back on the mind.

The principal Steps in Hatha Yoga are:

- Asana: Bodily postures that stimulate the glands, body, and nervous systems.
- Pranayama: Breath regulation that aims at mastery over the vital forces of the mind and body.

"Kundalini" is a fundamental psycho-physical energy attained through control of breath and mobilization of vital forces.

One who acquires success in hatha yoga gains such powers as vibrant health, youthfulness, and longevity and, if he or she does not become heavily ego-involved in the "look how cool I am to be able to do these things," has a head start toward attaining spiritual liberation and deep emotional well-being.

**Benefits from the path of Hatha Yoga:** It stimulates the brain, increases blood flow to areas of the body that normally receive little of it, and focuses the mind and provides self-confidence and control of the body. The life-force energy is stimulated. Oxygen intake is increased and the emotions are calmed.

**Problems with the path of Hatha Yoga:** The body may become an object of excessive preoccupation. There is the potential problem of becoming egocentric, vain, and too attached to displaying one's attainments. It is non-intellectual, and can potential lead to becoming introverted and isolated from the community.

**Points to remember in Hatha Yoga:**

Just "going through the motions" of doing the postures is not enough. Moment-by-moment awareness of present experience, including breathing, is essential, even when you are not explicitly practicing pranayama.

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**2. RAJA YOGA** ("Royal Yoga") is aimed at focusing and disciplining the mind. Most centrally it is the yoga of meditation.

Raja yoga involves control over the body posture and breathing. It goes on to concentration, which is the focusing of all mental energies on one object, one central idea, or one relevant truth, and then watching and noticing when the attention drifts away and bringing it back. Through this, we reduce our tendency to "monkey mind," with our attention darting here and there and everywhere, and develop the ability to direct and focus our attention, and indeed, to know where our attention is.

One objective is to develop the capacity to be aware of your thoughts, actions, and emotions as you are thinking, doing, and feeling them. This is sometimes called cultivating the "witness," a point of awareness within you from which you perceive all things as you do them. It is also sometimes referred to as "two pointed attention," in which one point of your attention is involved in your activity and the other point notices that this is what you are and what you are doing. The mystic George Gurdjieff used this same concept in his practice called "self-remembering;" it is also related to the "awareness continuum" of Gestalt Therapy. In Buddhist practice this is called "mindfulness." The physical position helps to center, provide mental calmness, balance, and equilibrium.

Raja yoga includes the ethical disciplines of nonviolence, truthfulness, simple living, austerity and endurance of hardship, self-purification, and the devoted study of spiritually ennobling books (although a strong focus on the latter would be considered Jnana yoga. Part of the austerity and practice is self-withdrawal--the act of transcending our involvement in society. Chaurhari compares this to "bracketing"--the process of phenomenological reduction in which we "bracket the world" in order to question, without judgment, which aspects of what we customarily think of as reality are actually real and which are illusory.

*Pratyahara* is the disengagement of the self from unthinking attachment to the not-self. This requires, of course, noticing what our essential self is and what is extra, unnecessary, the appendages of our society and surroundings that we carry with us.

*Savikalpa samadhi* is the existential self-awareness (to be distinguished from the quite different phenomenon of "self-consciousness") that takes place at the level of mental functioning. *Nirvakalpa samadhi* is a different matter entirely, a phenomenon at which all mental functioning is said to come to a stop, in which a person is directly in touch with his or her innermost reality. This is said to be a state of abiding bliss. It is a state that is very difficult to attain unless you go live in a cave in the Himalayas for six months under the supervision of a realized master.

**Benefits from the path of Raja Yoga** are stronger powers of concentration, mental focus, calmness, balance, and will power; and detachment from sources of unhappiness related to wanting or having status or material goods that may be difficult to attain or may be destructive of relations with others and the biosphere.

**Problems with the path of Raja Yoga:** Nirvakalpa samadhi is a very difficult state to attain, so most people who strive for it end up being attached to the goal of reaching a state that they never actually reach. This can be somewhat frustrating. Intuitively, it seems wiser to seek an attainment that many seekers can actually realize. Also, the goal of Nirvakalpa samadhi carries with it the danger of "life-negation," a loss of engagement with the world in which the person is not doing much of value to anyone.

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**3. BHAKTI YOGA** has two central dimensions. It is **the yoga of love and devotion, of identification of your spiritual connection and dedicating oneself to a particular god or guru or teacher and cultivating loving-kindness in your heart.** It is also a **yoga of practices that are designed to lead to states of ecstatic bliss**, such as chanting or dancing, or in some Christian tradition denominations, "speaking in tongues."

**Dyasa** is to experience a perfect feeling of security and happiness in the service of the Divine. Mystics long for the Divine Child to be born in their inner consciousness. The yoga of love seeks to turn this spirit of service and self-sacrifice to God, who is the ultimate protector and provider for all living creatures, or to the service of God's incarnation in the form of a particular God or Goddess.

A goal of Bhakti yogas as taught and practiced in India is to see God in everything and everyone. In the West, where a conception of God as transcendent but not immanent is widespread (see Part III below for an explanation if this is not clear to you), loving devotion to Jesus or Mary or in Mexico to the Virgin Guadalupe, would be a form of Bhakti yoga. The key is that, once that loving devotion is experienced, the person makes it a part of his or her own being and expresses that attitude in his or her actions, thoughts, and feelings toward others. Counting on God or the Divine Being or Spirit, however you conceive of him or her, as one's eternal friend, philosopher, and guide is called **sakya**. In India the divine is thought of as having masculine and feminine qualities equally. The yoga of love involves spiritual transformation of the erotic impulse.

**Benefits from the path of Bhakti Yoga:** A true Bhakti tends to have a sunny disposition and a strong sense that the world is good and all is as it should be. The states of bliss-consciousness which are a result of the ecstatic practices tend to be highly enjoyable. The practice of Bhakti tends to lead toward an

attitude of humility and forgiveness and letting go of the feeling of egotistical self-importance. All this helps make life meaningful.

**Problems with the path of Bhakti Yoga:** Insufficient realization of the Bhakti path, while committed to it in principle, can lead to intolerance of ways different from one's own, to sectarian bigotry, and to self-righteousness in which self-examination is absent and followers project their own shortcomings onto others. The characteristic attitude of submission can lead to a blind worship of one's guru which makes one unable to see the guru's weaknesses, and to an authoritarian attitude.

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**4. KARMA YOGA** is the yoga of action. It is dedicated to carrying out actions and projects that will improve the lives of others and help them on their paths toward liberation and enlightenment. It strives to avoid all actions that will cause unnecessary suffering or harm to others or other living beings.

Action is the essence of life. No one can ever stop acting. Even a person who shuts himself or herself off from the world is still acting. The doctrine of Karma, perhaps articulated most eloquently by the Jains, says essentially, "What goes around comes around." Each of our actions has consequences for others and for us ourselves. The karma yogi tries to make these actions and consequences as positive as possible. Karma yoga is sometimes associated with the monkey-god Hanuman, who was dedicated to "selfless service" or **seva**.

The yoga of action may be understood in three different ways. The first is performance of appropriate religious rites and ceremonies. The second is selfless action in the best interests of others and society, (such as feeding the hungry, nursing the sick, etc.), ideally performed out of a genuinely loving attitude rather than any feeling of obligation. The third is selfless dedication to the welfare of others on the basis of one's free self-development, in a way that is true to one's own inclinations and abilities. In this view, the foremost duty of each person is to develop his or her own latent possibilities, so that these will be available to both self and other. At its best, it is *selfless dedication to the welfare of other people and beings on the basis of one's own self-development*.

True Karma Yoga involves an attitude of fundamental equality between me and those whom I am helping. We meet as one person to another, on the same level and ground. In some way I happen to have been more fortunate in one or another of life's aspects, and therefore am in a position to help others.

Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Martin Luther King are examples of well-known Karma Yogis. They combined good work with a spiritual dimension.

**Benefits from the path of Karma Yoga.** It is especially useful for those of active habits. It can involve learning to do the best possible in a spirit of nonattachment.

(I do all I can, and then what happens happens, and so be it.) It can involve integrating accomplishment for the benefit of others with the discipline of spiritual development.

**Potential problems with the path of Karma Yoga.** It can be done with an attitude of false charity: "Here, ultracool I will help these poor undeserving wretches. . ." It can be restricted by attachment to and inability to see beyond the conceptual constraints of one's own class and social status. This can lead to denying one's individual talents, in order to meet conventional expectations, or toward perceiving Karmic action as advancing the interests of one's own class or group (whether the aristocracy or the proletariat) at the expense of others. It can be done with an attitude of self-congratulation, in which case it reinforces egotism. And it can be done with an attitude of self-righteousness, which drives a wedge between oneself and those perceived as less worthy.

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**5. JNANA YOGA** is the yoga of knowledge and wisdom. It has much in common with ancient Greek philosophy, which attempted to discover truth most centrally through the power of reason. Jnana yoga is scholarly and conceptual, attempting to find paths to self-knowledge and spiritual realization through the power of the intellect.

Jnana Yoga is not purely scholarly, however, for it applies intellectual disciplines to the cultivation of personal qualities. This side of it might reasonably be compared to contemplative meditation, and indeed shares some qualities with Raja yoga.

Steps in the path of jnana yoga are:

- **Discrimination:** understanding which can tell the real from the unreal. This involves detachment from the ephemeral values of life and cultivation of the eternal values.
- **Detachment:** Using the intellect to break away from attachment to the material world
- **Self-Discipline:** Using the intellect to cultivate calmness, restraint, renunciation, forbearance, self-settledness, and faith;
- **Longing for Freedom:** The desire for liberation leads to self-discipline which breaks attachments to our conditioned ideas of who we are and what we need. Blind conformity to social norms and customs is abandoned.
- **Systematic Reflection:** Reason and logic are used to work through doubts, eliminate distractions, and affirm one's total and greater.
- **Meditation.** Meditation can transform intellectual understanding and philosophic knowledge into non-dualistic realization and spiritual wisdom

**Benefits of the path of Jnana Yoga:** It can lead to great depth of spiritual insight, and it facilitates communicating insights & understandings to others.

**Potential problems with the path of Jnana Yoga:** It overemphasizes intellectual attainment and the monastic ideal and underemphasizes emotional and volitional aspects of human life. It can lead to one-upmanship in which the one who knows most thinks himself or herself better than those who know less. It can also lead to aloofness from and indifference toward the affairs of the world and problems of material and social existence.

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## **6. TANTRA YOGA**

Also known as Kundalini Yoga, Tantra Yoga has been influenced by Tibetan thought and is connected with worship of the divine as the Supreme Mother. It includes the archetypal masculine (Shiva) and the archetypal feminine (Shakti). It sees no antagonism between nature and spirit, but views all movements and acts as flowing from the universal creative spirit. Some Tantric Yogis emphasize moving the Kundalini energy up through all the Chakras, while some specialize in the development of a particular Chakra. Tantra is widely thought of in the West as specialization in the second (sexual) chakra.

Tantra does not emphasize asceticism and austerities, but views these as undermining healthy and balanced development. Instead, adepts learn to follow the spirit of nature and to appreciate the profound wisdom in nature. All natural desires are viewed as manifesting the creative spirit of nature. Personal development involves coming to know ourselves so we can follow the bent of our own being. As we develop such self-knowledge, base impulses and desires gradually yield to higher and nobler ones.

Kundalini energy is represented as a serpent. As it uncoils it stretches through each chakra and ultimately releases the powerful energy of the seventh or "crown" chakra, cosmic consciousness.

Tantric practitioners identify the obstacles and opportunities of each of the traditional seven chakras, and use a variety of techniques, including awareness and expression, guidance from within, meditative disciplines, chanting and other bhakti techniques, and "desireful prayer and worship" to achieve maximum fulfillment..

The chakras are in brief,

<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>QUALITY</b>
First	base of spine	security

Second	genitals	sexuality
Third	stomach	strength
Fourth	heart	love
Fifth	throat	speech
Sixth	forehead (third eye)	intuition
Seventh	crown	cosmic consciousness

(If you think it makes more sense to show them in the reverse order from that just above, that is, with the first chakra on the bottom and the seventh chakra on top, you're right, and that's the way they are traditionally depicted.)

Full development of the Kundalini energy without adequate preparation or supervision is said to unleash more energy than some people can handle and may even drive them crazy. But when the energy of each chakra is systematically developed, as the kundalini energy uncoils, its energy brings balance and the guidance of infinite patience and love. The person becomes secure, capable and appropriate in sexual expression, strong, loving, able to speak his or her truth, intuitively perceptive, and ultimately blissful and dedicated to the well-being of all those with whom he or she comes in contact. And at all these levels we receive guidance and support from the divine spirit.

A practice leading to the ultimate goal of the full realization of Tantra: spiritual effort is the union of the dynamic (changing, moving) and static (quiet, peaceful) aspects of personality.

***Benefits of the path of Tantra Yoga:*** On the whole (some individual gurus and disciples excepted), Tantra tends to be very openminded and minimally dogmatic. It encourages self-determination and thorough and systematic psychological, physical, and social development as part of the path to liberation. Also, it prescribes methods and attitudes for great sex for both partners.

***Problems with the path of Tantra Yoga:*** It can be interpreted in a way that leads to great self-indulgence and lack of attributing sufficient value to self-discipline.

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## **7. SRI AUROBINDO'S PURNA (INTEGRAL) YOGA**

This is a modern synthesis of the traditional yoga systems of India. It is not one of the traditional yogas, but was described by the great twentieth-century Indian spiritual teacher Sri Aurobindo. Although he has passed on, his ashram in Pondicherry, in Southeast India, continues his work. The ashram's work includes remarkable restoration of what was previously a total environmental disaster area.

Active participation in life needs to accompany mental serenity and self-purification. The inward processes of concentration and meditation are, in Haridas Chaudhari's words, "pursued in a spirit of self-offering to the Divine." Chaudhari writes, "The great Indian poet Tagore stressed the concept of finding freedom amid the bonds of human relationship and society. The modern renaissance of Indian philosophy began with an affirmative and dynamic attitude toward life and an optimistic gospel of social reconstruction, political freedom, and cultural creativity."

Integral yoga exposes the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the traditional systems, writes Chaudhari, and gives yoga an affirmative and dynamic form, taking into account evolutionary and historical perspectives. Action, love, wisdom, and peace are equally important elements in self-integration. "Love in its spiritual essence is an attribute of wisdom. It flows from the vision of the interdependence of all life and the oneness of all existence. It is active interest in the progress and betterment of society. It is the joyful expression of the soul emancipated from the bonds of selfishness. . . . Freedom is not liberation from society but liberation in society. . . . Nature is no enemy of the spirit. On the contrary, she conceals the spirit in her bosom."

What Aurobindo has tried to do is to include the elements and ideas from each of the traditional yogas that he found useful and true, and leave the others by the wayside. In so doing, he provided a profound conceptual innovation. We may note that Aurobindo was also one of the relatively few yogis who was also deeply thoughtful and active in regard to the connections between spiritual development and the social and environmental context in which we live.

## **PART II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF YOGIC THOUGHT AND PRACTICE**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

**1. CONTRAST WITH CHINA.** India has a history of mystical and supernatural life patterns. The land and climate are alternately benevolent and overpowering. China tends toward the practical and matter-of-fact. The land and climate, for the most part, require diligent constant effort to live.

**2. DISTINCTION: YOGIC, HINDU, & BUDDHIST THOUGHT.** In some ways they interpenetrate, in some ways quite different.

- One current of Hindu and yogic thought has roots in Dravidian (pre-Aryan India.) Some of the Indian gods and goddesses are related to this ancient period, such as apparently Hanuman, the fierce monkey-god of selfless service, and Ganesha, the elephant-god that is also the deity of scholars. Another current was heavily influenced by the Brahmin teachers who were the highest caste that developed after the Aryan invasions from Greece, Persia, and the Middle East. Later Hindu teachings arose as reforms and became more psychological in character.
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- Yogic thought: Its emphasis is on disciplines of personal development largely or entirely independent of any religious tradition, some yogis being atheists, some agnostic, and some Hindu or Buddhist.
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- Buddhist thought: With roots in yogic thought and Indian culture, the Buddha developed a systematic, analytical approach to personal development. Buddha was not interested in questions about gods or metaphysics. The approach was meant to help people live happier lives & decrease suffering. Later, Buddhism split into several currents, some keeping the original spirit, some becoming formalistic.

**3. THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF BEING.** This contrasts with western linearity.

**4. ACTION VS. CHARACTER.** Western ethics generally aim at teaching how to act; Eastern ethics at forming character. A good character will act rightly, or refrain from action, according to circumstances.

## 5. FORMS OF YOGA

- Hatha yoga: Yoga of the body
- Raja yoga ("royal yoga") Yoga of meditation. Includes yoga of everyday awareness practice.
- Bhakti yoga: Yoga of devotion
- Tantra yoga: Yoga of raising the kundalini powers in each of the chakras
- Karma yoga: Yoga of service
- Jnana yoga: Yoga of knowledge and wisdom.

For commentary, see "Part i: The Principal Yogas" above."

**6. DHARMA** (duty) to be fully what one is (Hindu). Ideal: justice made alive. To follow the path described in the teachings (Buddhist.) To do what the circumstances demand of one. (All.)

**7. SAT:** The "radiance of being" which shines through the man or woman executing perfectly part of the dharma..

## B. A MINI~HISTORY

### I. PREHISTORY AND EARLY HISTORY

**1. Earliest evidence of yoga activity:** There is evidence that a yogic tradition existed in Dravidian, pre-aryan India. At Mohenjo Daro, there is a seal showing a man seated in lotus posture, flanked by two worshippers with raised and folded hands. Behind each worshipper is a half-rearing snake. Another seal shows a man in lotus pose on pedestal, surrounded by elephant, lion, buffalo, rhinoceros and pair of deer. There are other figures with their eyes closed in meditation. Similar figures are found at the other ancient ruins along the Indus river at Harappa, They are dated to between 2000 and 3000 B.C.

- According to one telling, there is no evidence that yoga had a wide following in Dravidian India. It was too much of a discipline, probably followed only by a minority, just as is the case today.
- According to a different telling, Dravidian (pre-Aryan) India was part of a past golden age which is best known by the ruins found on Crete (Minoan civilization). What's clear is that Dravidian Indian religion was deeply and profoundly a nature-oriented religion, and that yogic practices did exist at that time.
- The Aryan conquerors were by most accounts a more brutal, primitive group of invaders from the north. Eventually there was a gradual interpenetration of Dravidian and Aryan cultural currents. The origins of the caste system may date back to this time, with the invaders taking the higher caste.

**2. Throughout recorded history, India has had a strong tradition of yogis, rishis, and wandering forest philosophers.** The independent free-thinkers have been and are respected for being outside the framework of established religions. This tradition is called Sramanism. Yogis and other independent teachers sometimes are called Sramanas.

### II. THE VEDIC AGE.

**1. During this period, India was dominated by Aryans,** who had already established a caste system with Brahmins at the head. Brahmin priests were all-powerful until the Upanishad age. Aryan religion has been characterized as brutal and materialistic. Rituals involving horse sacrifices went on for 3 weeks.

**2. The caste system** was rigid and oppressive. It was a means for the conquerors to keep the conquered suppressed. The Brahmin priests wielded great power.

**3. The Vedas:** These were scriptures of the Aryan conquerors, from India's earliest scriptural period. They included the Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Artharva-Veda. There were hymns, mantras, prayers, and psalms dealing with religious ceremony and ritual, and their use in rites and holy occasions. Earliest scriptural period. Vedas were the literature of Brahminism. There is ongoing controversy about the age of the oldest Vedas. From the descriptions of the stars and plants found in them, some scholars place them as old as 6000 years ago. The Vedas are almost unreadable today.

**4. Each Veda is divided into two sections.** SAMITAS were mantras, prayers, and psalms dealing with religious ceremonial and ritual. BRAHMANAS analyses and commentaries on the samitas, describing their use for particular occasions and rites..

**5. Brahmins jealously guarded their monopoly** of the knowledge contained in the Vedas. In one telling of the story, the Sramanas apparently viewed the Vedas as so much mumbo-jumbo. They moved away from population centers, settled in forests, collecting round them a few students and disciples. Became known as rishis, or forest philosophers.

**6. Aryurveda.** A later development was Aryurvedic philosophy, which emphasizes physical healing. Vedic sciences attribute life to air, wind, fire, the earth, planets, stars, etc. Aryurveda is a sophisticated and knowledgeable system that depends heavily on naturally-growing plants. A web search brings up a detailed exposition.

### III. THE UPANISHADS.

**1. The Sramanas** were characterized not only by independence from established religious forms, but also by practices of austerity, meditation, non-violence, and yogic breathing and physical exercises. Some were atheist, some agnostic, some theistic. Some held more strongly than others to the twin doctrines of reincarnation and karma.

**2. Early Upanishads** were produced by yogis and other Sramanas. They attempted to discredit the formalism and narrowmindedness of the priests in the eyes of the rulers and other castes. Literally, upanishad means "secret teaching."

**3. Upanishads are sometimes called the fourth part of the Vedas, but in fact the represent something quite different,** Indeed, they were a reaction against much of the the Vedic tradition Sramanas (yogic and other independent teachers) were tolerated when Brahmin priests were not strong enough to eliminate them, but were hunted down, killed or driven away when the priests had full control. It appears that the kings or other rulers were sometimes not so happy about the heavy control exerted by priests. (The kings were of the

kshatriyas, or warrior caste, which was defined as inferior to the Brahmins. In the Upanishads we see some kings quite willingly and readily being converted to the Yogic teachings. There was almost certainly a political as well as a spiritual dimension to all this.

**4. Many of the Upanishads were in form of dialogues** between kings and yogis, occasionally with Brahmins joining in. Some of the dialogues included women. Some of the later upanishads were written by Brahmins. By that time the sramanic tradition had heavily influenced orthodox Brahminism.

**5. Manas, buddhi, and atman.** Upanishadic thinkers, distinguished among manas, or mind, buddhi, or discriminative intellect, and self, or atman, or spirit. The Atman, sometimes translated as "self," refers to the divine spirit that is present in everyone and every living being and that we can, if we pay attention and develop an appropriate practice, find within ourselves as well. Through the Atman we are connected with all beings. (Religious scholars will recognize this as a conception of God as immanent, or present in all living beings, in contrast to the conception of God as transcendent, or "the big man in the sky," as in Judaism and Christianity. In the contemporary Hindu tradition, the divine presence is conceived of as **both transcendent and immanent**, and western religions are critiqued as theologically naive to view it as transcendent only.

**6. Restraint, or self-discipline,** is a central upanishadic current, especially restraint in the senses. For upanishadic thinkers the "senses" the indriyas, include both cognitive and executive organs: including speech, manipulation, walking, evacuation, and reproduction. A person without understanding will have his mind and acts unrestrained, like wild horses running out of control. The one who restrains his speech in the mind, restrains the mind in understanding, and restrains the understanding in the self or spirit, reaches **shanti, or tranquility and peace of mind.**

**7..** Some yogis of the Upanic period were settled **householders** with families, most often when an enlightened king kept the power of the Brahmins under control.

**8.** The abstraction and speculations of the Upanishads arrived at by practices of **raja yoga and jnana yoga.** The Chandogya Upanishad asks, "Is there anything higher than thought? Yes, meditation is higher than thought."

**9.** Each upanishad was transmitted by a different rishi, so there is much repetition. They were written at different times, from the first to the last **over a span of at least a thousand years.**

**10. The Principal Upanishads.** Of the 108 Upanishads collected by the scholar Shankara (Sankara), he considered 16 to be authoritative and to contain the substance of all the others. He selected 10 as unique and of lasting value, and

wrote lengthy commentaries on them. These 10 are known as the Principal Upanishads. I like the versions found in Vivian Worthington's *History of Yoga*.)

**11.** The Upanishads placed a heavy emphasis on **renunciation**. Turning inward. Independence from passion, letting go of unnecessary desires. My own appraisal is that here is a place where the yogic tradition went astray by pushing the principle too far, just as western philosophy went astray in deifying the thinking mind and vilifying emotion. In both cases, emotion & passion are the enemy. What is left out is learning to live with our emotional life as full, rich, and useful, but not an overpowering and debilitating part of who we are. There is no place for Zorba the Greek's approach to life in Upanishadic Yoga. It was to take seven or eight hundred years until Tantra Yoga appeared on the scene for this insight to develop, and even today many contemporary yogic practitioners still adhere to the old tradition of attempting to develop utter passionlessness.

## IV. JAINISM

**1.** This is another Sramanic current that was active at same time as the Upanishads. It developed around the same time as the early Upanishads. Parsva, a semi-mythical figure, is said to have been the founder, but Jainism awaited the later appearance of its greatest teacher, **Mahavira**, who was a contemporary of the Buddha, to gain wide influence. A member of the Kshatriya caste, Mahavira joined the Jain order as a monk, spent twelve years in self-mortification and utmost austerity. After 13 months, he discarded his clothing and all his possessions and taught for the rest of his life. He died in 476 B.C.

**2.** Jainism is perhaps the most extreme expression of **radical nonviolence**. (shanti). This was the first, most central precept. Don't harm even an ant or fly. We may imagine that ultimately in some manner Mahavira influenced Gandhi.

**3. The universe is a living being**, just like the human body, in the Jain view. This concept of the living universe with its various functions was part of the whole Sramanic philosophy, but most fully articulated by the Jains. "As every single part of it is sacred, and worthy of reverence, even down to rocks and soil, one must not do violence to any of it. So the Jain monk moves deliberately, and treads everything gently."

**4. Karma** was also centrally important to the Jains. We come into the world with certain kinds of karma, but can eliminate old karma and allow new karma in. If a soul is making progress, the new karma will be more subtle. Every act produces karma--the process of living is by definition the process of producing karma. Karma is passed from lifetime to lifetime, influencing the form in which we are reborn. But we can also make good use of the idea in this lifetime, as a doctrine of causality and responsibility. We are constantly emptying ourselves of old karma, and filling ourselves with new. The color of our "life crystal" changes

throughout life as the karmic debt changes. One (but not the only) central reason for bad karma, and obstacle to creating good karma is Pride, which makes us refuse help, or to be incapable of enjoyment. We come into the world with certain kinds of karma, but can eliminate bad karma through good deeds and self-cultivation. Our acts have wide-reaching implications, they react back on us, and they affect us also through their influence on our own character.

5. Jains have always had monasteries where they could practice disciplines. But they have not kept separate from the wider Jain community. Lay members are fully involved, and are urged to adopt as many of the practices of the monks as compatible with everyday life.

6. "Yoga fully acknowledges its debt to Jainism, and Jainism reciprocates by making the practice of yoga part and parcel of its spiritual life."

## V. LATER YOGA

1. **SAMKYA.** The founder of the Samkya teachings was Kapila, a 9th century BC teacher of history. It was essentially atheistic. The principal concepts included purusha (spirit), prakriti (matter), and the three gunas., which later found their way into the *Bhagavad Gita*.

2. **THE BHAGAVAD GITA** is the most widely-read scripture in India. It is part of the Mahabharata epic. *Maha* means Great, and *Bharata* is an ancient name for India, so the name means "Great India." The Gita brought together threads from the Upanishads, Samkhya, and Jainism. The many gods of the Hindu pantheon, and also the two basic elements of the cosmos, purusha and prakriti, became viewed as less important than the one God Brahman-Atman. The Gita brought all atheistic and dualistic threads together with Brahmanism's theistic-monistic threads.

In the Gita, Lord Krishna is involved in helping out the members of one side of a fratricidal war, and his commentaries in the midst of the battle contain a variety of spiritual themes. Arjuna, the leader of the Pandavas, watches his kinfolk being slaughtered in a battle and speaks of his doubts to his charioteer, who reveals himself as Krishna, a reincarnation of the Hindu trinity, Brahman (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver) and Shiva (the Destroyer).

Krishna tells Arjuna that pleasure and pain, defeat and victory are of equal worth. The wise fulfill the duties of life in a joyful manner, doing their work well, without attachment. The Gita places special emphasis on not being attached to the results of our actions. We give a matter our best thought and action, and then what happens happens. At that point it is very nice if things go as we wished, but since we did our best, there is no point in berating ourselves if they don't. Here

the conceptions of karma yoga and nonattachment are combined. Gandhi echoed this theme with his emphasis on the means as well as the ends. The Gita advises a yoga of renunciation and nonattachment. Renunciation is to give up all actions motivated by desire, and nonattachment is to renounce the fruits of the actions.

In the Gita the practice of Yoga is brought down into everyday life as karma yoga, an active yoga of everyday living that complements the traditional ascetic and meditative yoga. The results are to be social and psychological, not transcendental. It is a yoga of selfless action, which makes use of the ancient concept of dharma. Krishna points out that the supreme being permits and takes delight in the many ways of mankind, and permits every kind of faith and creed. He sees human beings wrapped in maya (illusion), but does not intercede to enlighten them. The whole process is leela (play.)

Various chapters of the Gita deal with renunciation and meditation. Whoever works according to his dharma but cares not for the fruits of his actions is a true yogi. If he is anxious over the future he is no yogi. Yoga is not for one who overeats, or sleeps, or fasts too much --he must be moderate in all things. One who seeks to unite the self with Brahman is greater than those who practice austerities of have great knowledge. The Gita advocates the development of a mystical union with Brahman: "I am everything that man can conceive of. Worship me at the center of your being." The Braman-Atman equation was arrived at by yogic meditation, which bypassed the thinking process by introspection and contemplation. The mind is encouraged to go inward beyond itself, by looking within, and cultivating the "witness." The three gunas, Tamas (the force of inertia), Rajas ( the force of action) and (Sattwas) the force of mind & enlightenment, get considerable play in the Gita.

**3. THE YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI.** (These were written about 200 years after Buddha taught, somewhere around 300 B.C., and probably after the Bhagavad Gita.) The Yoga Sutras starts with the simplest efforts at mental discipline, and moves from there to how to attain the heights of samadhi (if you're using Patanjali as a guide to how to get there, however, I can only say "good luck!") Then it goes on to Principles of Yoga, Disciplines of Yoga and Miraculous Powers. Sutras 1-33 are about what we might call the full realization of our potential. 34-56 deal with "miraculous powers," but Patanjali says, "The yogi does not regard these powers as ends in themselves. Dwelling on them becomes an obstacle to higher samadhi." In other words, if you develop some special ability through yogic practice, don't get hung up on how cool you are or it becomes just another ego trip--back to square one. ("Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200.")

In Patanjali as in the Upanishads, Passionlessness is seen as a goal of practice. Gardner and Lois Murphy, commenting on The Yoga Sutras, write, "It seems to us that there is a constant emphasis upon passionlessness, which means, upon close analysis, the lack of all positive affect. At times pain, in the sense of

unpleasantness or "negative affect," seems to be the only affect considered. At times the teaching seems to favor getting free of all affect. There are, nevertheless, references to joy, in a context which seems to imply that the jogin has joy or is pursuing joy as part of his training. It seems to us that Patanjali is saying, as many in the West have done, that peace or serenity is both affectless and also joyful; and we can make sense out of this only if life for Patanjali is axiomatically regarded as painful."

Again, I return to Zorba as a reference point. The bliss of the ancient yogis, as best we can read it, had little room for enjoyment. It explicitly put down sensory pleasures as obstacles to liberation. (I think the obstacles is not the pleasures, but getting hung up in them, in having to have them.) In yoga the goal is samadhi, or bliss consciousness, achieved through "bringing our energy up to the crown chakra." It is a state of getting very "high" through meditative practice, but something achieved by few people who are not dedicated yogis.

MY COMMENTS: DETACHMENT, OR NONATTACHMENT "Letting go," from the starting point of noticing how we're holding on--to things, possessions, people, circumstances in our lives, people, etc. Much of our unhappiness is viewed as holding on to things we can't hold on to. For some yogis this is an absolute ideal. The wonderful example is the monkey-trap--a cocoanut with a piece of banana inside and a hole big enough that the monkey can put its hand in to get the banana but not big enough to pull its hand back out clenching the banana. A rope is attached to the cocoanut, and the trapper can then go up and catch the monkey. All the monkey has to do is let go and it's free--but it's a rare monkey that lets go. Most keep holding the banana and get caught. All this is fine and true. The trouble, it appears to me, comes when we make it an absolute. It is possible to get **too attached to the ideal of nonattachment**. I don't *want* to be nonattached to my family, for example.

RENUNCIATION, which is closely related to nonattachment, is a central theme in later as well as in early yoga. Murphy & Murpy write: "Renunciation is a great word in the religions of both Europe and Asia, but in Europe it is almost active. Except to advanced mystics, it means abandoning a natural attitude and deliberately assuming another which it is difficult to maintain. Something similar is found in India in the legends of those ascetics who triumphed over the flesh until they became very gods in power. But it is also a common view in the East that he who renounces ambition and passion is not struggling against the world and the devil but simply leading a natural life. His passions indeed obey his will and do not wander here and there according to their fancy, but his temperament is one of acquiescence, not resistance. He takes his place among the men, beasts, and plants around him and, ceasing to struggle, finds that his own soul contains happiness in itself."

MONKEY-MIND -- in both cognition and action. Monkeys are getting a bad rap here, but this refers to someone whose mind (or actions) jump in first one

direction, then another. The goal is equanimity and peace of mind, being able to choose how we wish to feel and think and act, cultivating this quality through meditation.

## VI. TANTRA YOGA.

In the West we tend to think of Tantra as just a yoga of sex. REALLY GREAT SEX. Oh, yeah--intercourse that lasts forever. Harmonizing the breathing of the partners is a starting point. A favorite Tantric position has both partners sitting cross-legged, the man beneath, the woman in his lap with her legs curled around his back. Actually Tantra dealt not just with sexuality but with all the chakras. There were Tantra yogis who specialized in a given chakra (exploring the Tantra of Power, or of Loving Kindness, or of communication, etc.). The fullest tantra yoga involved mastery and enjoyment of all the chakras. Currently popular "kundalini yoga" is a tantra yoga that involves attempting to move body & spirit energy (kundalini) up the spine through all the chakras and into the cosmic consciousness or crown chakra. (Not recommended unless you have very close supervision from a master in the tradition.) Not widely realized in the West is that Tantra yoga has both the "left-handed path" which includes the sex trip just described and the "right-handed path" which looks somewhat askance at the left-handed path and emphasizes development of all the chakra energies. Repeating what was stated above in "The Principal Yogas," the charkas are,

- 7th or crown chakra: cosmic bliss/consciousness
- 6th chakra (third eye, in middle of forehead) intuition, awareness, curiosity, seeing-into
- 5th chakra (throat): communication
- 4th chakra (heart): love
- 3rd chakra (stomach): power
- 2nd chakra (genitals): sex
- 1st chakra (anal sphincter): security. (The most frequent last words on the recorder when a pilot realizes his plane is going to crash: "Oh, shit!")
- 

There is a complex psychology built around Tantra Yoga and the chakras, and this is just a word or two to point out that it exists. It probably influenced Abraham Maslow's conception of the "hierarchy of needs."

## VII. VEDANTA.

"Anta" means end. Later, "Veda" and "Anta" were combined to form word "Vedanta", which means the higher forms of modern Hinduism, which are founded on the end of the Vedas.

Vedanta was an attempt by Hinduism to recover ground lost to Tantra & Buddhism. Buddhism in India by then had itself largely fallen into formalism.

Vedanta began with Shankara's Commentaries on the Gita and Upanishads. Shankara's *Crest Jewel of Discrimination* is the definitive Vedantic text. Shankara (686-719 AD) died at the same age of Jesus, so he was youthful and enthusiastic. Handsome, intelligent, at age 10 debating with learned men in the temples. Shankara set out to purify Hinduism by teaching an extreme asceticism and a monism based on the Brahman=atman equation. There is very little that is truly new in his text, which is framed as a conversation between an illumined master and his disciple. It is primarily a repetitive yet poetic recitation of themes found in the Gita, with an emphasis first on renunciation of worldly desires, of interest in enjoyment of the objects of the senses, and second on contacting the Atman within through meditation and an recognition the identity of Atman with Brahman, the divine substance of the entire universe. He has also incorporated a few themes from Buddha's teachings.

Here are a few quotations that capture the spirit of Shankara, from the Prabhavananda/Isherwood translation.

A teacher is one who is deeply versed in the scriptures, pure, free from lust. . . He is upheld continually in Brahman, calm like the flame when its fuel is consumed, an ocean of the love that knows no ulterior motive, a friend to all good people who humbly entrust themselves to him. . . . It is the very nature of these great souls to work, of their own accord, to cure the troubles of others. . . .

A sickness is not cured by saying the word "medicine". You must take the medicine. Liberation does not come by merely saying the word "Brahman". Brahman must actually be experienced. . . .

The pure truth of the Atman, which is buried under Maya and the effects of Maya, can be reached by meditation, contemplation and other spiritual disciplines . . . but never by subtle arguments. . . .

Of the steps to liberation, the first is declared to be complete detachment from all things which are non-eternal. Then comes the practice of tranquillity, self-control, and forbearance. And then the entire giving-up of all actions which are done from personal, selfish desire. . . . Thus the wise man reaches the highest state, in which consciousness of subject and object is dissolved away and the infinite unitary consciousness alone remains."

## VIII. THE HINDU CONTEXT.

Except in Muslim and Sikh regions, India is overwhelmingly Hindu today, so it is difficult to avoid some mixup among yogic and Hindu traditions. Central in Hindu teachings is the trilogy of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, along with their consorts (wives, female partners).

In Hindu teachings, Brahma is "the creator" & lord of all being (Brahma has masculine gender and despite the similarity of the words should not be confused

with Brahman which has neuter gender and is seen as the supreme reality underlying all life, the impersonal divine ground of being)

Vishnu is "the preserver" (also called "the cosmic force of goodness), who is also incarnated as Rama, Prince of Joy; and as Krishna, who comes to earth to re-establish dharma, or the divine law and duty.

Shiva is "the destroyer", as necessary for life as creation and preservation. Shiva is also the God of Yogis and the conqueror of death.

Shakti is cosmic energy, the Divine Mother, God's feminine aspect. She is Shiva's consort. Shakti also incarnates as the devoted and loving Parvati, and as Durga, a fierce warrior-woman who can conquer anything and anyone, depicted riding on a lion, and the many-armed Kali.

There are also Radha, who is Krishna's consort, Sita, who is Ram's consort, Saraswati, the goddess of music, the arts, and learning who is Brahma's consort, and Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity, who is Vishnu's consort.

There are psychological dimensions to all the many gods and goddesses, but that's beyond the scope of this lecture. For a (not exhaustive) summary of Hindu deities, see: <http://www.hindunet.org/god/summary/index.htm>

In India many people are devoted to a particular deity and there are temples devoted to many of them. In Hindu theology, God is both transcendent and immanent, existing as Brahman, as Atman (the divine Self that is at the center of every person that we can learn to contact), in each of the many Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, and in every living being.

## **PART III. CENTRAL THEMES IN YOGIC & HINDU PSYCHOLOGY & PHILOSOPHY**

Below, bulleted items in italics are my phrasing of the ancient teachings. Non-italic items in parentheses are my commentaries on them. I present these ideas not with the idea that they are "right" and others "wrong," or vice-versa. They emphasize some ideas and teaching that are different from some of those emphasized in the West, and we can learn what we can from them.

Please note that I do not romanticize the East and contrast it with the "jaded West." In my observation most people in India follow these principles to about the same degree that most people in the Christian west follow the teaching that Jesus taught: a lot of lip service but too not much beyond that. For every real yogi and spiritual aspirant in India there are a thousand others living their ordinary lives, placing flowers at altars, and grasping only bits of the teachings.

**NOW, THE THEMES.** Of course there is quite a bit of overlap with Parts I and II above, since this is a summary.

**1. DESIRE FOR THAT WHICH WE ARE UNLIKELY TO GET OR ATTAIN LEADS TO UNHAPPINESS.** Psychological development involves learning to let go of such desires. (Some desires are innate, such as those things that fulfill our basic needs. Those become a problem only when they're not met, or when we come to believe that we need much more than we really do.)

**2. ATTACHMENT IS A PRINCIPAL CAUSE OF SUFFERING.** We are attached to many things. Some cause us grief when they're torn from our grasp, while others cause us grief through the process of attachment itself. Learning to let go, and letting go is an important way to deal with attachments that cause us trouble.

Note 1: Some attachments are natural, such as those to family, and places where we've lived for a long time. Some help us survive, such as attachments to traffic safety rules. But most of us cause ourselves needless suffering through attachment to things, people, and ideas that we have no choice to let go of, or would be better off letting go of.

Note 2: Some followers of Eastern philosophy are so attached to the idea of nonattachment that they neglect to note their attachment to it.

**3. CHAKRAS** "are psychic centers that cannot be described fully from a materialistic or physiological standpoint." They are centers of "subtle, vital force. Chakra is a Sanskrit word that denotes circle and movement. Chakras can be thought of as wheels of the mind that dwell in the forest of desires." And desires, like wheels themselves, are great motivating forces. Each chakra is a stage-by-stage playground of desires. Throughout life one dwells in this forest of desires, and one thinks and understands life's situations from the standpoint of the chakra in which he normally feels most comfortable." (Harish Johari, 1987, Destiny Books.)

**4. DETACHMENT FROM THE FRUITS OF OUR ACTIONS.** The Bhagavad-Gita poetically emphasizes the importance of doing the very best we can to achieve what we set out to, and realizing that then the hand of God or Fate will do as it does, so that our efforts may or may not succeed, and we need not cause ourselves great grief about it as long as did what we could. (This seems to me related to the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre's characterization of our responsibility for creating our lives, within the context of our "thrown" condition.)

**5. KARMA** is the law of life which states that everything we do has effects, on us, on others, and on other living beings and other beings and things around me. It refers especially to the ways in which sooner or later many of my own actions react back on me, since life is a complex set of interwoven loops of causes and effects.

**6. AHIMSA** is the principle of radical nonviolence. It refers not only to nonviolent action but also to the cultivation of a nonviolent attitude of mind and emotion which goes along with that action.

**7. DHARMA.** 1. "Duty." 2. "Being sensitive to what the situation requires and doing it." 3. "A statement of principles for living an aware and beneficent life."

**8. LETTING GO OF EGO-ATTACHMENT** receives great emphasis. If I'm going yoga, to simply do it, and not add the thought, "Look at how well I'm doing this," etc. Rather I'm breathing, and feeling the life force flowing through me, and be at one with the divine. Instead of "trying," I'm just "doing," whatever that doing may involve. This has sometimes been called "merging with the infinite," feeling at-one with the river of life that flows into the ocean of spirit. (Or, as Obi-Wan-Kenobi would have it, "the Force." All this is easier said than done. It includes not looking down on others whom I consider "spiritually inferior" to myself because of their lesser attainments or different beliefs. It also includes awareness of, rather than denial of, those aspects of myself that I consider less than admirable.)

**9. SEVA (SELFLESS SERVICE).** Acting in ways that benefit other people or beings for the simple sake of doing so, out of a sense of connection and dharma, without self-congratulation for doing such good things.

**10. PURIFICATION.** This is a path of attempting to let go of attachments that make spiritual realization difficult or impossible, including delusion, ignorance, violence, greed and avarice, sensuality, egotism, and conceit. (Some of the yogic and Hindu teachers appear to me to overdo their rebellion against sensuality, which can be a delightful part of life. I'm guessing that this is because they live and taught before birth control became widely available, and having too many children could mean suffering for all.)

**11. SIMPLICITY** is a yogic principle which holds that much of the trouble we get ourselves into occurs because of unnecessary ENTANGLEMENTS and complexities that we introduce into our lives, and that living simply makes it easier to find peace of mind.

**12. PRACTICES THAT LEAD TOWARD SPIRITUAL REALIZATION** include devotion, austerity, purification, and the development of awareness, balance, and selfless service. These steps can lead us through the development of a state of consciousness that includes a sense of security, being in good communication with our bodies, finding the strength to accomplish our goals, openheartedness, speaking in a way that touches others deeply and makes it easy for them to listen, developing our intuition, and attaining cosmic consciousness (living in a characteristic state of bliss and joy in which we perceive truth or untruth directly with no intervening screen of delusion, and feel at one with others, other living beings, and the divine spirit.)

**13. PUJA** is performing a devotional practice, some ritual of gratitude to our personal spiritual guide, prophet, teacher, or guru of whatever faith. It involves, for at least a moment, giving up my sense of self-importance to give thanks for all that the world, or if you prefer, the Lord, or the Divine Spirit, has given me, and for the guidance that my teacher offers. (There is formal and informal puja. Informal puja involves trying to make a sense of spiritual awareness part of daily life, rather than something apart from it once a week, and doing each of the things I do with an attitude of respect and reverence, whether it's cooking a meal, cleaning a toilet, or doing something for or with another person or receiving something from them.)

**14. THE THREE GUNAS** are *Tamas*, which means roughly the force of torpor or inertia; *Rajas*, which means the force of doing and activity'; and *Sattwas*, the force of thinking and enlightenment. (I have yet to grasp the value of this categorization.)

**15. A FEW WORDS ABOUT HINDU THEOLOGY.** Religious philosophers of the subcontinent refer to God as transcendent (the great being beyond the sky who is above and beyond everything); God as immanent (the divine spirit is present in every living being, and therefore if we are sensitive we see and hear and feel God everywhere); and God as simultaneously transcendent and immanent. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam the emphasis is on God as transcendent. In Native American teachings the emphasis is on God as immanent. Hindus view divinity as simultaneously transcendent and immanent. They view it as naive to regard divinity as just one or the other.

Actually, it is even more complex than that. There is a whole pantheon of gods and goddesses roughly analogous to those of Greece but also quite different. These are viewed as a living presence in India, and the ordinary people feel themselves to be surrounded by them everywhere. A very talented Dutch artist was painting a picture of Krishna with a little artistic embroidery and people passing by said, "No, it has to be done just so!" He found that he had more artistic license when he returned to Holland.

**16. A CYCLICAL VIEW OF LIFE.** The basic Hindu trilogy is Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Shiva, the Destroyer. This reflects the Hindu view that all things are created, exist for a time, and are destroyed and pass away. This cyclical view of life is very different from the Western linear view that we are always moving forward in "progress." The Atman, or Self, is not the little ego-centered self, but the recognize around us and in all other beings, and also find within us. People have favorite gods and goddesses who model certain qualities for us to realize. The goddess Radha represents loving devotion, and the monkey-God Hanuman represents selfless service (sometimes in a fierce sort of way.)

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THAT'S ALL, FOLKS.