

Yoga: Hatha, Shabd, and Raja **by Richard Rose**

Richard Rose describes his early investigation into the confusing varieties of yoga, and his good fortune in encountering the books of Paul Brunton as a guide. If you like the dynamism and spontaneity of Richard Rose as speaker and teacher, please order his books from www.rosepublications.net or www.tatfoundation.org.

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There is something both magical and absurd about yoga, ingredients we find in all spiritual work; but then we find something absurd only and not in any degree magical, about the simple calisthenics which westerners perform for reasons of health.

I can remember my own reactions to yoga, forty years ago when I first encountered a few books on the subject. In those days the public libraries kept very few volumes on yoga, or any non-Christian books that pointed toward "pagan" influences.

I think my first book was one by Yeats-Brown. He talked mainly of the lotus posture, and of standing on his head. Every child wants to stand on his head at some time or another, so that the thought of an adult wishing to stand on his head might appear to most as being an unconscious return to childhood. And most of us would like to find an exercise in magic that is simple and effortless, or nearly effortless.

I later obtained books on yoga which contained more details. I found many postures and mudras in these books, and found that a whole way of life was connected with the word yoga, which involved vegetarianism, body cleansing and celibacy. I must admit that I never tackled all of the yogic positions, and some of the body-cleansing routines – such as the rectal inhalation of water and the swallowing and reclaiming of yards of gauze – had no meaning for me. I did learn to sit in the lotus posture because it was a comfortable position for prolonged meditation, and I was able to stand on my head for a half hour at a time. I have no logical reason for the head stands. It may have been because of some subconscious, childish urge, but I prefer to believe that I was trying to experiment with the posture in order to measure its benefits.

As my reading progressed, I discovered that there existed another form of yoga called raja yoga. It was the yoga of the mind, and this form appealed to me. I sensed or rationalized, that I was not cut out for years of squatting and concentrating upon the body and its well-being. I wanted to go directly to the problem of ultimate survival, if such existed, and I felt that statistics left little hope for any ultimate survival for the body, even though its "chakras" might be developed, and its muscles and tendons were disciplined.

We cannot help but note that hatha yoga is widely practiced while raja yoga is not so well known. I encountered one of the first books that Paul Brunton wrote on the subject of yoga, and was overjoyed to find that he paid hardly any attention to hatha yoga, but went right to the root of things, namely the place that yoga has in regard to contemplation and higher realization.

However, I think that I know the reason for the wide interest in hatha yoga, both in India and in this country. When a person first approaches the "mysteries" or the psychic sciences, his first inclination is to plunge into a study that will link the physical body to the soul, or to physical immortality.

We are reluctant to admit at first that the body just cannot be saved, or extended forever. And when we find that no magic in India or Tibet will enable us to live forever, or even for two hundred years, our scientific minds must turn to the next best thing, which is the discovery of that part of us which we might call a soul, and from there check our chances for spiritual security.

But once again our enquiry tends to be scientific and mundane—at least in the beginning. I remember that I went into Spiritualism while still in my teens, hoping to establish contact with the dead.

I wanted to talk to the dead to find first-hand, testimonial proof from the best authorities on death. I think everyone wants to determine the contact point between the mundane body and a being (the soul) which may have no form. We wish to see with our eyes and feel with our hands, if possible, like St. Thomas. We might not realize it at the time when we venture into hatha yoga or Spiritualism, *but we are trying to use our body, and material associations, as points of reference.*

It only occurs to us later that we might attain some point of essence-awareness, and then use that as a point of reference to reappraise this physical dimension.

In India, there is a prevailing mood to accept the soul as defined by teachers and ancestors, rather than define it personally, or try to reach a consciousness of it. So that the Indian student of hatha yoga does not talk too much about a soul. And the teachers of raja yoga do not try to locate it as much as to hint that it is "that which is." Everything else is either illusory or secondary.

There is a vast nether land between elementary hatha yoga and the most profound forms of raja yoga. Hatha yoga, we find, is not all gymnastics. It also involves the kundalini, and the chakras. And the training of the kundalini is supposed to lead the seeker to a raja yoga state. And simultaneously with mental yoga we find many a "master" following hatha yoga postures, and perhaps performing witnessable miracles in this medium of maya and illusion.

The chakras are said to be spiritual centers, not just ganglia. The kundalini is a veritable serpent of power, and if it refers to the power of a particular gland (gonad), you will pick up such an inference only by the description of the rising serpent of sex energy. Incidentally, I am inclined to believe that the serpent mentioned in Genesis is the same power of sex, which can obviously be misused, indicating that when it is misused it must be crushed. Charles Fillmore, in his book, *The Twelve Powers of Man*, finds pretty much the same message in the tale of the paradisiacal apple.

Next we hear of a spiritual nectar that somehow leaks out of the brain to the detriment of the soul. Paul Brunton, in *A Search in Secret India*, interviews a yogi by the name of Brama, who tells him that there is a tiny hole in the brain where the soul resides, and that part of the vital life force rises from the bottom of the spine and moves up toward the soul's abode. This rising energy is the equivalent of kundalini. Brama stated that if a yogi were able to bring this vital energy up through a valve in the bottom of the soul's resting place, then that yogi might conquer death, or prolong his life indefinitely. We see in these statements that this yogi places great credence in the concept that the contact point of body and soul has been located, and the tempting concepts about physical immortality preclude any doubts or enquiry about the soul's proof of existence.

Paul Brunton asks the young yogi if there is not a finer form of yoga than hatha yoga, and Brama agrees that his form of hatha yoga is but a prelude to the yoga of mind-control.

Brunton moves on politely. We find in the next interview some of the most profound statements on mind-yoga, statements which I paid little attention to when I read them thirty years ago, because I did not have a sufficient understanding of the goal of raja yoga, and consequently could not see the wisdom in the replies which came from the "Sage who never speaks."

Brunton had made a clumsy appeal for enlightenment through verbal exchange. The Sage replied, "You have thought yourself into your present ignorance; now think yourself back into wisdom, which is the same as self-understanding. Thought is like a bullock cart which carries a man into the darkness of a mountain tunnel. Turn it backwards and you will be carried back to the light again."

Ten years ago, having forgotten all about reading Brunton, I came to the conclusion that man must reverse the processes that led him into his ignorance or confusion. We are reminded of the Cave of Shadows in Plato's Republic, in which the seeker has his back to the real light. And at that time I wrote of the reversal of the vector of man in order to reach his source, and the implementation of direct mentation instead of logic and scholastic wisdom.

Back in 1934 when the book was published, Brunton was practically the sole American source for information of any worth about Indian, spiritual movements. He could have easily filled in his experiences with some interesting fiction and we would never have known the difference. To the contrary, I find him very honest and correct, but I could not say this about him until the 'fifties, when I encountered teachers from some of the groups he visited for the writing of this single book.

In the early 'fifties I was initiated into a sect whose roots go back to Agra and Dayalbagh. When I joined them, I had forgotten all about Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. Now, many years later, I pick up the book again and am amazed to see that it was all there, and had been there for the ten years that elapsed between my reading it and the opportunity for joining the sect and getting first-hand information.

The sect in question was the Radha Soami sect, and the chief guru at that time was Charan Singh. With them, I encountered the term "shabd yoga" for the first time. This is the

yoga of listening. The theme behind it might be said to be the development of the hearing faculty until the person can distinguish the sounds or music of higher planes. (Once again we find the searcher looking for a body-contact-point, with another dimension.)

I think that the reason Brunton's account in Chapter 13 did not register more indelibly in my mind at the time was my unfamiliarity with shabdyoga then, and also my lack of interest in the conversation recorded by Brunton which he had with Sahab Maharaj on the subject on the economy of India and Dayalbagh in particular.

I have always been of the conviction that the politics and economy of our environment cannot interfere with the energy needed to untie the Gordian knot of ignorance on spiritual matters. Later, of course, I was to learn that hunger and oppression are conditions under which any form of spiritual work is negated or lessened.

I can see now that Brunton was impressed by the poverty of India, perhaps even sorrowed by it. I would not have picked this up about him if I had not paid a visit to Cairo. My first impression of Cairo was that of a place which I should leave immediately, if I wanted to get out of it alive and uncontaminated. However, the longer I stayed there, the more I grew to love the poor people. I worried my guides and the hotel clerks with questions about poverty, and with suggestions. I only talked about philosophy to the residents once. This happened at the temple of Luxor, when a large group of students approached me and asked me for my ideas about God. I found more purpose to passing out pencils to the children, and in giving piasters to very plain looking women who sat in the dust with their children, trying to sell little packets of spices.

In regard to the shabd-yoga sect, I later found that about the time of Sahab Maharaj there was a schism in the Radha Soami sect. I was initiated into the other branch. Both branches claimed to be the real heir to the line that began with Soamiji Maharaj, or Soami Shiv Dayal, in 1861. These branches were known as the Dayal Bagh, and the Soami Bagh. Schisms occurred if a guru failed to leave a legal heir to his property and the ashram. And it is evident that the desire to inherit may have been greater for some than the desire to perpetuate a true system.

Of course the high point in *A Search In Secret India* is Brunton's meeting with the Maharishi of Arunachala, also known as Ramana Maharshi. Two chapters are devoted to his association with Ramana, and yet as the years passed I carried little with me from the reading until I had an experience of my own. When this occurred, I looked about for words to describe the strange trauma I endured and the even stranger realization which followed the trauma.

And oddly enough, I encountered a small tract by Ramana Maharshi, or by one of his disciples, and in it he described not only the experience but in simple symbology explained the difference between lesser and major illumination. (This is his likening of Kevala Samadhi to a bucket lowered into a well, and that of Sahaji Samadhi as being the river that flows into the ocean and returns no more.)

In Ramana's camera-analogy he gives, in a capsule, the method of finding self-knowledge. Indirectly, I have Brunton to thank for all of this. I am sure that hundreds of thousands of people have read Paul Brunton's books, but I doubt if he ever became wealthy from

his writings, because his audience would have been a slow trickle. That which made his contribution worthwhile, was that that trickle has lasted for forty years, and it may grow stronger.

I find a thread of honesty in Brunton's books, and this thread will secure his fame. Occasionally he found that previous assessments were incomplete, and he did not hesitate to admit that his previous enthusiasm led to hasty praise. So that he remains valid, and is a unique authority on a subject that is difficult to appraise, much less master.

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