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VIII

YOGA AND THE WEST

FOREWORD TO SUZUKI'S
"INTRODUCTION TO ZEN BUDDHISM"

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EASTERN
MEDITATION

THE HOLY MEN OF INDIA

YOGA AND THE WEST ¹

859 Less than a century has passed since yoga became known to the West. Although all sorts of miraculous tales had come to Europe two thousand years before from the fabled land of India, with its wise men, its gymnosophists and omphalosceptrics, yet no real knowledge of Indian philosophy and philosophical practices can be said to have existed until, thanks to the efforts of the Frenchman, Anquetil du Perron, the Upanishads were transmitted to the West. A general and more profound knowledge was first made possible by Max Müller, of Oxford, and the Sacred Books of the East edited by him. To begin with, this knowledge remained the preserve of Sanskrit scholars and philosophers. But it was not so very long before the theosophical movement inaugurated by Mme. Blavatsky possessed itself of the Eastern traditions and promulgated them among the general public. For several decades after that, knowledge of yoga in the West developed along two separate lines. On the one hand it was regarded as a strictly academic science, and on the other it became something very like a religion, though it did not develop into an organized Church—despite the endeavours of Annie Besant and Rudolf Steiner. Although he was the founder of the anthroposophical secession, Steiner was originally a follower of Mme. Blavatsky.

¹[Originally published in *Prabuddha Bharata* (Calcutta), February 1936, Shri Ramakrishna Centenary Number, Sec. III, in a translation by Cary F. Baynes, upon which the present translation is based.—EDITORS.]

860 The peculiar product resulting from this Western development can hardly be compared with what yoga means in India. In the West, Eastern teaching encountered a special situation, a condition of mind such as the earlier India, at any rate, had never known. This was the strict line of division between science and philosophy, which had already existed, to a greater or lesser degree, for some three hundred years before yoga teachings began to be known in the West. The beginning of this split—a specifically Western phenomenon—really set in with the Renaissance, in the fifteenth century. At that time, there arose a widespread and passionate interest in antiquity, stimulated by the fall of the Byzantine Empire under the onslaught of Islam. Then, for the first time, knowledge of the Greek language and of Greek literature was carried to every corner of Europe. As a direct result of this invasion of so-called pagan philosophy, there arose the great schism in the Roman Church—Protestantism, which soon covered the whole of northern Europe. But not even this renewal of Christianity was able to hold the liberated minds in thrall.

861 The period of world discovery in the geographical and scientific sense had begun, and to an ever-increasing degree thought emancipated itself from the shackles of religious tradition. The Churches, of course, continued to exist because they were maintained by the strictly religious needs of the public, but they lost their leadership in the cultural sphere. While the Church of Rome, thanks to her unsurpassed organization, remained a unity, Protestantism split into nearly four hundred denominations. This is a proof on the one hand of its bankruptcy, and, on the other, of a religious vitality which refuses to be stifled. Gradually, in the course of the nineteenth century, this led to syncretistic outgrowths and to the importation on a mass scale of exotic religious systems, such as the religion of Abdul Baha, the Sufi sects, the Ramakrishna Mission, Buddhism, and so on. Many of these systems, for instance anthroposophy, were syncretized with Christian elements. The resultant picture corresponds roughly to the Hellenistic syncretism of the third and fourth centuries A.D., which likewise showed traces of Indian thought. (Cf. Apollonius of Tyana, the Orphic-Pythagorean secret doctrines, the Gnosis, etc.)

862 All these systems moved on the religious plane and recruited

the great majority of their adherents from Protestantism. They are thus, fundamentally, Protestant sects. By directing its main attack against the authority of the Roman Church, Protestantism largely destroyed belief in the Church as the indispensable agent of divine salvation. Thus the burden of authority fell to the individual, and with it a religious responsibility that had never existed before. The decline of confession and absolution sharpened the moral conflict of the individual and burdened him with problems which previously the Church had settled for him, since her sacraments, particularly that of the Mass, guaranteed his salvation through the priest's enactment of the sacred rite. The only things the individual had to contribute were confession, repentance, and penance. With the collapse of the rite, which did the work for him, he had to do without God's answer to his plans. This dissatisfaction explains the demand for systems that promise an answer—the visible or at least noticeable favour of another (higher, spiritual, or divine) power.

863 European science paid no attention to these hopes and expectations. It lived its intellectual life unconcerned with religious needs and convictions. This—historically inevitable—split in the Western mind also affected yoga so far as this had gained a footing in the West, and led to its being made an object of scientific study on the one hand, while on the other it was welcomed as a way of salvation. But inside the religious movement there were any number of attempts to combine science with religious belief and practice, as for instance Christian Science, theosophy, and anthroposophy. The last-named, especially, likes to give itself scientific airs and has, therefore, like Christian Science, penetrated into intellectual circles.

864 Since the way of the Protestant is not laid down for him in advance, he gives welcome, one might say, to practically any system which holds out the promise of successful development. He must now do for himself the very thing which had always been done by the Church as intermediary, and he does not know *how* to do it. If he is a man who has taken his religious needs seriously, he has also made untold efforts towards faith, because his doctrine sets exclusive store by faith. But faith is a charisma, a gift of grace, and not a method. The Protestant is so entirely without a method that many of them have seriously interested themselves in the rigorously Catholic exercises of Ignatius

Loyola. Yet, do what they will, the thing that disturbs them most is naturally the contradiction between religious and scientific truth, the conflict between faith and knowledge, which reaches far beyond Protestantism into Catholicism itself. This conflict is due solely to the historical split in the European mind. Had it not been for the—psychologically speaking—unnatural compulsion to believe, and an equally unnatural belief in science, this conflict would have had no reason to exist. One can easily imagine a state of mind in which one simply *knows* and in addition *believes* a thing which seems probable for such and such reasons. There are no grounds whatsoever for any conflict between these two things. Both are necessary, for knowledge alone, like faith alone, is always insufficient.

865 When, therefore, a “religious” method recommends itself at the same time as “scientific,” it can be sure of finding a public in the West. Yoga fulfils this expectation. Quite apart from the charm of the new and the fascination of the half-understood, there is good reason for yoga to have many adherents. It offers not only the much-sought way, but also a philosophy of unrivalled profundity. It holds out the possibility of controllable experience, and thus satisfies the scientist’s need for “facts.” Moreover, by reason of its breadth and depth, its venerable age, its teachings and methods which cover every sphere of life, it promises undreamt of possibilities which the missionaries of yoga seldom omit to emphasize.

866 I will remain silent on the subject of what yoga means for India, because I cannot presume to judge something I do not know from personal experience. I can, however, say something about what it means for the West. Our lack of direction borders on psychic anarchy. Therefore, any religious or philosophical practice amounts to a psychological discipline; in other words, it is a method of psychic hygiene. The numerous purely physical procedures of yoga are a physiological hygiene as well, which is far superior to ordinary gymnastics or breathing exercises in that it is not merely mechanistic and scientific but, at the same time, philosophical. In its training of the parts of the body, it unites them with the whole of the mind and spirit, as is quite clear, for instance, in the *prāṇayāma* exercises, where *prāṇa* is both the breath and the universal dynamics of the cosmos. When the doing of the individual is at the same time a cosmic happen-

ing, the elation of the body (innervation) becomes one with the elation of the spirit (the universal idea), and from this there arises a living whole which no technique, however scientific, can hope to produce. Yoga practice is unthinkable, and would also be ineffectual, without the ideas on which it is based. It works the physical and the spiritual into one another in an extraordinarily complete way.

867 In the East, where these ideas and practices originated, and where an uninterrupted tradition extending over some four thousand years has created the necessary spiritual conditions, yoga is, as I can readily believe, the perfect and appropriate method of fusing body and mind together so that they form a unity that can hardly be doubted. They thus create a psychological disposition which makes possible intuitions that transcend consciousness. The Indian mentality has no difficulty in operating intelligently with a concept like *prāna*. The West, on the contrary, with its bad habit of wanting to believe on the one hand, and its highly developed scientific and philosophical critique on the other, finds itself in a real dilemma. Either it falls into the trap of faith and swallows concepts like *prāna*, *atman*, *chakra*, *samādhi*, etc., without giving them a thought, or its scientific critique repudiates them one and all as "pure mysticism." The split in the Western mind therefore makes it impossible at the outset for the intentions of yoga to be realized in any adequate way. It becomes either a strictly religious matter, or else a kind of training like Pelmanism, breath-control, eurhythmics, etc., and not a trace is to be found of the unity and wholeness of nature which is characteristic of yoga. The Indian can forget neither the body nor the mind, while the European is always forgetting either the one or the other. With this capacity to forget he has, for the time being, conquered the world. Not so the Indian. He not only knows his own nature, but he knows also how much he himself is nature. The European, on the other hand, has a science of nature and knows astonishingly little of his own nature, the nature within him. For the Indian, it comes as a blessing to know of a method which helps him to control the supreme power of nature within and without. For the European, it is sheer poison to suppress his nature, which is warped enough as it is, and to make out of it a willing robot.

868 It is said of the yogi that he can remove mountains, though

it would be difficult to furnish any real proof of this. The power of the yogi operates within limits acceptable to his environment. The European, on the other hand, can blow up mountains, and the World War has given us a bitter foretaste of what he is capable of when free rein is given to an intellect that has grown estranged from human nature. As a European, I cannot wish the European more "control" and more power over the nature within and around us. Indeed, I must confess to my shame that I owe my best insights (and there are some quite good ones among them) to the circumstance that I have always done just the opposite of what the rules of yoga prescribe. Through his historical development, the European has become so far removed from his roots that his mind was finally split into faith and knowledge, in the same way that every psychological exaggeration breaks up into its inherent opposites. He needs to return, not to Nature in the manner of Rousseau, but to his own nature. His task is to find the natural man again. Instead of this, there is nothing he likes better than systems and methods by which he can repress the natural man who is everywhere at cross purposes with him. He will infallibly make a wrong use of yoga because his psychic disposition is quite different from that of the Oriental. I say to whomsoever I can: "Study yoga—you will learn an infinite amount from it—but do not try to apply it, for we Europeans are not so constituted that we apply these methods correctly, just like that. An Indian guru can explain everything and you can imitate everything. But do you know *who* is applying the yoga? In other words, do you know who you are and how you are constituted?"

869 The power of science and technics in Europe is so enormous and indisputable that there is little point in reckoning up all that can be done and all that has been invented. One shudders at the stupendous possibilities. Quite another question begins to loom up: *Who* is applying this technical skill? in *whose* hands does this power lie? For the present, the state is a provisional means of protection, because, apparently, it safeguards the citizen from the enormous quantities of poison gas and other infernal engines of destruction which can be manufactured by the thousand tons at a moment's notice. Our technical skill has grown to be so dangerous that the most urgent question today is not what *more* can be done in this line, but how the man who is

entrusted with the control of this skill should be constituted, or how to alter the mind of Western man so that he would renounce his terrible skill. It is infinitely more important to strip him of the illusion of his power than to strengthen him still further in the mistaken idea that he can do everything he wills. The slogan one hears so often in Germany, "Where there's a will there's a way," has cost the lives of millions of human beings.

870 Western man has no need of more superiority over nature, whether outside or inside. He has both in almost devilish perfection. What he lacks is conscious recognition of his inferiority to the nature around and within him. He must learn that he may not do exactly as he wills. If he does not learn this, his own nature will destroy him. He does not know that his own soul is rebelling against him in a suicidal way.

871 Since Western man can turn everything into a technique, it is true in principle that everything that looks like a method is either dangerous or condemned to futility. In so far as yoga is a form of hygiene, it is as useful to him as any other system. In the deepest sense, however, yoga does not mean this but, if I understand it correctly, a great deal more, namely the final release and detachment of consciousness from all bondage to object and subject. But since one cannot detach oneself from something of which one is unconscious, the European must first learn to know his subject. This, in the West, is what one calls the unconscious. Yoga technique applies itself exclusively to the conscious mind and will. Such an undertaking promises success only when the unconscious has no potential worth mentioning, that is to say, when it does not contain large portions of the personality. If it does, then all conscious effort remains futile, and what comes out of this cramped condition of mind is a caricature or even the exact opposite of the intended result.

872 The rich metaphysic and symbolism of the East express the larger and more important part of the unconscious and in this way reduce its potential. When the yogi says "prāna," he means very much more than mere breath. For him the word *prāna* brings with it the full weight of its metaphysical components, and it is as if he really knew what *prāna* meant in this respect. He does not know it with his understanding, but with his heart, belly, and blood. The European only imitates and learns ideas

by rote, and is therefore incapable of expressing his subjective facts through Indian concepts. I am more than doubtful whether the European, if he were capable of the corresponding experiences, would choose to express them through intuitive ideas like *prāna*.

873 Yoga was originally a natural process of introversion, with all manner of individual variations. Introversions of this sort lead to peculiar inner processes which change the personality. In the course of several thousand years these introversions became organized as methods, and along widely differing lines. Indian yoga itself recognizes numerous and extremely diverse forms. The reason for this lies in the original diversity of individual experience. This is not to say that any one of these methods is suited to the peculiar historical structure of the European. It is much more likely that the yoga natural to the European proceeds from historical patterns unknown to the East. As a matter of fact, the two cultural achievements which, in the West, have had to concern themselves most with the psyche in the practical sense, namely medicine and the Catholic cure of souls, have both produced methods comparable to yoga. I have already referred to the exercises of Ignatius Loyola. With respect to medicine, it is the modern psychotherapeutic methods which come closest to yoga. Freud's psychoanalysis leads the conscious mind of the patient back to the inner world of childhood reminiscences on one side, and on the other to wishes and drives which have been repressed from consciousness. The latter technique is a logical development of confession. It aims at an artificial introversion for the purpose of making conscious the unconscious components of the subject.

874 A somewhat different method is the so-called "autogenic training" of Professor Schultz,² which consciously links up with yoga. His chief aim is to break down the conscious cramp and the repression of the unconscious this has caused.

875 My method, like Freud's, is built up on the practice of confession. Like him, I pay close attention to dreams, but when it comes to the unconscious our views part company. For Freud it is essentially an appendage of consciousness, in which all the individual's incompatibilities are heaped up. For me the un-

² [The German psychiatrist J. H. Schultz. The reference is to his book *Das autogene Training* (Berlin, 1932).—EDITORS.]

conscious is a collective psychic disposition, creative in character. This fundamental difference of viewpoint naturally produces an entirely different evaluation of the symbolism and the method of interpreting it. Freud's procedure is, in the main, analytical and reductive. To this I add a synthesis which emphasizes the purposiveness of unconscious tendencies with respect to personality development. In this line of research important parallels with yoga have come to light, especially with *kundalini* yoga and the symbolism of tantric yoga, lamaism, and Taoistic yoga in China. These forms of yoga with their rich symbolism afford me invaluable comparative material for interpreting the collective unconscious. However, I do not apply yoga methods in principle, because, in the West, nothing ought to be forced on the unconscious. Usually, consciousness is characterized by an intensity and narrowness that have a cramping effect, and this ought not to be emphasized still further. On the contrary, everything must be done to help the unconscious to reach the conscious mind and to free it from its rigidity. For this purpose I employ a method of active imagination, which consists in a special training for switching off consciousness, at least to a relative extent, thus giving the unconscious contents a chance to develop.

876 If I remain so critically averse to yoga, it does not mean that I do not regard this spiritual achievement of the East as one of the greatest things the human mind has ever created. I hope my exposition makes it sufficiently clear that my criticism is directed solely against the application of yoga to the peoples of the West. The spiritual development of the West has been along entirely different lines from that of the East and has therefore produced conditions which are the most unfavourable soil one can think of for the application of yoga. Western civilization is scarcely a thousand years old and must first of all free itself from its barbarous one-sidedness. This means, above all, deeper insight into the nature of man. But no insight is gained by repressing and controlling the unconscious, and least of all by imitating methods which have grown up under totally different psychological conditions. In the course of the centuries the West will produce its own yoga, and it will be on the basis laid down by Christianity.