



Anataranga Yoga- *The Yoga of Inner Transformation*

Developing a New Pedagogy

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Abstract:

This paper is a first-person account of how the author has developed a pedagogy appropriate in contemporary times for the teaching of Anataranga Yoga (the Yoga of inner transformation). It outlines how the wisdom of Yogacharya Krishnamacharya and the “identity group” process methodology developed by Prof Pulin K. Garg enabled the author to deal with personal trauma. It then speaks about the attempts made by the author to bring coherence and convergence between the two approaches to healing and transformation. The second part of the paper describes a very successful application of the pedagogy developed through a decade of experimentation. Dr Anita Balasubramanian and the author conducted a 12-week course on the Yoga Sura (over the web) for the Hindu University of America. Essays written by the participants at the end of the course reflects the depth of the self-transformation that participants experienced. The paper concludes by sharing the insights gained through dialogues with Dr Anand Paranjpe and Dr Kundan Singh on the pedagogy and how it compares with current modes of teaching psychology.

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Part 1

The search begins

I went to Shri Desikachar in the early 70's with very serious questions about life. Firstly, when I was completing my education in engineering from IIT Madras I was searching for a life purpose. This search led to a meeting with Dharampal ji, a Gandhian who had played a prominent role in the Independence movement. He challenged me with the following question "Can you make India a great Nation by running behind the tails of the west?" This was followed by a recommendation "study a traditional area of knowledge with a master for ten years and then see how you can apply it to solve contemporary problems." Secondly, soon after my graduation I joined the family business and discovered that it was going sick. In spite of our best efforts the business crashed. Apart from the shock of business loss one had to face the aftermath in the family that turned out to be very traumatic. My discipleship with Shri Desikachar and his father Yogacharya Krishnamacharya and the decade long study and practice of Yoga became the bed rock on which I rebuilt my life. A few years into my study with Shri Desikachar, I met Prof. Pulin K. Garg, a pioneer in encounter group work in India. Prof Garg called his unique approach to small group experiential learning mode the "Identity Groups". This was based on Upanishadic dialogue as well as the intimate self-disclosure of Gandhiji. My inner transformation was significantly aided by engaging deeply with Prof Garg and his work.

Through the ten plus years of study and practice, teaching Yoga, and engaging with Identity Group work, I discovered a profound coherence in the philosophy, world view, and introspective methodology underpinning both approaches to self-transformation. However, the teaching of Yoga did not have the possibility of intimate group dialogue. I could share the insights of my self-reflection with Shri Desikachar in my private classes, but there was no healing community.

To illustrate, we had daily theory classes on the Yoga Sutra with Yogacharya Krishnamacharya. While he explicated the sutras, Yogacharya would give personal examples from his life and sometimes use stories from the *ItihAsa-PurANa*. He emphasized that the classroom was for *shravaNam* (focused listening) and the rest of the day was for *mananam* (reflection and contemplation). Here the observation of one's feelings, thoughts and actions was the key. When speaking about the *yama* (interpersonal discipline), Yogacharya recommended that one observe how one interacts with others and the inner dynamics of the engagement. In the one-on-one classes with Shri Desikachar, there was an opportunity

to share personal dilemmas. As soon as I walked into his class, Shri Desikachar was astute in his observation and would often ask insightful questions about my psychological state. The discussions would be an opportunity to illustrate how the Yoga Sutras enable one to introspect and discover one's answers. Sometimes he would propose specific practices, either *Asana*, *prANAYama* or *bhAvana* (inner practices), that would help me to meet the challenges I was facing.

Dialogue and self-reflection in small groups

A few years after I started my study of the Yoga Sutras, I contacted Prof. Pulin K Garg who is one of the pioneers in bringing encounter group work to India. The Encounter Group work is based on an eclectic mix of methods drawn from western psychology. Dr Garg brought in his insights and wisdom from a deep study of Indic philosophy and western psychology in creating a coherent theoretical frame in which he situated "Identity Group work".

I was invited to the inaugural dialogue on Identity Group work because of my background in Yoga. I found the process of dialogue, self-disclosure and self-reflection an ideal space for *mananam* (contemplation). The presence of others also committed to self-enquiry made the process rich. I could not only experience the dynamics of my psyche, but I could also listen to other people's insight into their inner processes. Many of the sutras that we were examining in my classes with Shri Desikachar resonated with the inner struggles that participants spoke about and the insights they shared as clarity emerged. To illustrate, these were some Sutras that were reflected in the processes of the "Identity Groups":

- The notion of the *avidya kshetram*- the ground of erroneous assumptions and conclusions about self and the world; (Chapter 2- Sutras 3 to 9),
- *samskAra* and *vAsana*- the inner residues that create conditioned behaviour (Ch 4- Sutras 8 & 9),
- The symptoms of an unsteady mind (Chapter 1- Sutra 30),
- The various practices defined in Chapter 1 from Sutras 33 to 38 that suggest contemplation on one's relationships with people, objects, life force and dreams,
- The process to end *duHkha* (Chapter 2- Sutras 10,11 & 24).

Discovering the convergence between the two processes

Prof. Garg was fascinated with the parallels I was discovering and wanted to delve deeper into Yoga Psychology. I facilitated a meeting between Prof. Garg and Shri Desikachar, and they met regularly over a few months. These discussions explored the convergences and

divergences between Yoga Psychology and Western Psychology. They identified about 70 sutras that form the core of what is known as Anataranga Yoga in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. These sutras focus on the psychological transformation essential for engaging with the deeper aspects of *dhyAna* and *samAdhi*. Without this transformation, where one's *duHkha* (personal suffering) is ended, and one's energies are gathered and collimated without dispersion (*pratyAhAra*) the deep inner practices of *dhAraNa* (focused attention to a chosen enquiry) with a one-pointed mind (*ekAgrata*) are not possible. This dialogue between Prof Garg and Shri Desikachar continued for a few years.

Through the next few decades when I was straddling both worlds, I experimented with a convergence between the two methods. I was able to discuss the experiments I was doing (with myself initially and then with groups that I was facilitating) with my mentors. We concluded that the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, as taught by Yogacharya Krishnamacharya, traverses the ground covered by Identity Group work and plumb a spiritual depth that the self-reflective group work does not touch. However, by applying the principles of transformation enunciated in 70 essential sutras of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the Identity group work methods, one can offer a very meaningful method for introspection gain insights into the workings of one's psyche.

My endeavor to integrate the two modes of learning

My understanding of the Upanishadic dialogue of the *gurukula* (a small learning community that lives with a *guru* in his *ashram*), as well as the Buddhist communities of practice and truth seeking namely the *sangha* led me to believe that they were the best combination of the two modes of learning that I was fortunate to experience deeply. However, modern urban lifestyles do not support the *gurukula/ sangha* mode. I began experimenting with a transformative and experiential mode of learning in the 90's. The process gathered momentum when a group of young people who called themselves "sacred activists" approached me a few years later. They were disillusioned with what they saw on the ground. The India that was being shaped did not have a coherent design, their own education had not equipped them to anchor themselves in a meaningful world view. Their work required a deep personal anchorage since they were engaging with people who were facing very difficult life contexts. They came with the question "is there an Indic way of discovering an inner foundation and an outer expression that is rooted in our cultural moorings?" The "sacred activists" were keen on exploring the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali as a way of transforming themselves as well as preparing themselves for their encounters on the ground.

The learning process that emerged with this group proved to be an exciting space for discovery. The “sacred activists” saw themselves as a sangha (a community of practitioners). They were ready for intense introspection and intimate dialogue. They were committed to a long term *sAdhana*. This group then formed the Ritambhara Ashram. My wife, Sashikala Ananth (one of the foremost scholar and practitioner of *vAstu shastras*) and I were invited to be the elders of this group and play the role of mentors. The methods we experimented with while working with this group have subsequently been refined into specific programme offerings. These are:

- The Saptaswara- 7 key word-concepts that are core to understanding the Indic Wisdom traditions are explored in detail. These seven words are drawn from the Yoga Sutras, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and the *vAstu* tradition. These words are *Maitri, Karma, Dharma, GnAna, Ramya, Yoga* and *AbhyAsa*. We spent about 6 hrs examining each word-concept (once a week) and the Sutras/ shlokas that elaborated on these word-concepts. The outcome was an internalization of the values that these word-concepts describe, the introspective process they trigger and the practice that is required to be transformed by the immersive learning. This has then been shaped into an offering called Saptaswara.
- An immersion into the Mahabharata - to answer the question “what is heroism in the emerging context?” we went back to the Mahabharata. The process of *svAdhyAya* that is recommended in the Yoga Sutra (Chapter 2- Sutra 1) is facilitated by the study of *ItihAsa-PurANa*. Archetypal heroic energies and their light and dark sides are illustrated in the Mahabharata through a vast array of stories. Dr Girindrashekar Bose³ has called the Mahabharata the most fascinating and complete “compendium of case studies”. Through a combination of introspective practices drawn from Yoga, Theatre and Dance, the participants prepared themselves to plunge into a process of awakening their archetypal energies, the key to discovering personal power and *dhArmic* purpose. An intense embodied exploration of critical stories from the Mahabharat became the mirror through which the participants discovered their propensities as well as the inner dynamics that impacted a sense of balance, flow, and energy. This enquiry led to the shaping of an intensive programme called the

³ Samiksha- 1957, Vol 1 No 2; Girindrashekar Bose on the Yoga Sutra.

Mahabharata Immersion and a lighter on-line version called the Mahabharata Exploration.

- Continued engagement through the practice of *Asana & prANAyAma*, study of the Yoga Sutra-s, self-study, dialogue, and mentoring.

Towards an Andragogy

It was clear to us that what we had evolved was a new pedagogy, more aptly andragogy, an adult learning method (not a teaching of children). We believe that the form of learning in Upanishadic times involved much dialogue based on self-enquiry on the part of the learners. To illustrate, the Prashna Upanishad begins by naming the six scholars who approach sage Pippalada: Kabandhin Katyayana, Bhargava Vaidarbhi, Kausalya Asvalayana, Sauryayanin Gargya, Saibya Satyakama and Sukesan Bharadvaja. They raise the six questions as soon as they introduce themselves, but are asked to live in the ashram, meditate with *shraddha*. After this period of introspection and meditation the discourse begins. The answers provided are terse. Alex F Osborn⁴ in the book Applied Imagination states (in the introduction) that he was inspired by the mode of enquiry that was employed in Upanishadic times which he developed and called “Brain Storming”. We can, therefore, legitimately imagine that the six scholars and others in Pippalada’s ashrama had intense discussions apart from engaging in individual self-reflection during their stay. The entire learning process was based on dialogue and not a lecture given from a pulpit. The method we have used for the study of the Yoga Sutra and Mahabharata (and other Indic shastras) is probably close to the Upanishadic method.

Part 2

Shaping a new pedagogy

To formalize what we had discovered through the years of our *sAdhana* (diligent practice) I had a series of discussions with a few of the members of Ritambhara Ashram who have also started to facilitate learning groups using the methods that emerged in our experiment.

⁴ Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem Solving; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.

The key learnings were captured with reference to the Yoga Sutra's of Patanjali as well as other Wisdom books that we studied. We came up with the following insights:

Who comes to the study of Yoga?

A person with a disturbed mind (*vikshepa chittan*) who is experiencing the symptoms of a being in the disturbed state (*vikhipta*), namely illness, laziness, doubt and so on (*vyAdi, styAna*⁵), as well as suffering (*duHkha*), mental disability (*daurmanasya*), physical disability (*angamejayatvam*) and disturbed breath (*shvAsa prasvAsa*), sees the futility of seeking answers outside⁶. The cycle of entanglement and attachment with the world (*bhoga*) that the person is caught with is making things worse and not better.

What does the YS recommend?

The YS sets out a clear injunction- single pointed effort (*ekatatva abhyAsa*⁷) “engage in an intense practice that enables one to be anchored in Consciousness-as-such”. However, it lays

⁵ Sutra 1.30 – vyAdhi-styAna-samshaya-pramAda-Alasya-avirati-bhrAnti-darshana-

alabdhabhUmikatva-anavasthitatvAni citta-vikShepAH te-antarAyAH; व्याधिस्त्यानसंशयप्रमादालस्याविरतिभ्रान्तिदर्शनालब्ध
भूमिकत्वानवस्थितत्वानि चित्तविक्षेपास्तेऽन्तरायाः ॥ ३० ॥

In the practice of Yoga, the sAdhaka (practitioner) often experiences blocks and obstacles. They may be illness, inertia, doubt, carelessness, fatigue, over excitement, wrong perception, inability to build a foundation, or the inability to locate the self in a bhUmi, g round.

⁶ Sutra 1.31- duHkha-daurmanasya-angamejayatva-shvAsa-prashvAsA vikShepa-saha-bhuvaH;
दुःखदौर्मनस्याङ्गमेजयत्वश्वासप्रश्वासा विक्षेपसहभुवः ॥ ३१ ॥

A mind without anchor causes distress, pain, physical unsteadiness and disturbed breathing

⁷ Sutra 1.32- tat pratiShedhArtham ekatattvAbhyAsaH; तत्प्रतिषेधार्थमेकतत्त्वाभ्यासः ॥ ३२ ॥

out many possible ways of going about this seeking. It recognizes that everyone comes to the study from their own particular conditioned mind (*vastu sAmye citta bhedaAt tayorvibhaktaH panthAH*⁸). It therefore offers many methods and ends with saying “choose a path that resonates deeply with you, (*Yatha abhimataH dhyAnAd va*⁹) and persist with it without getting distracted (*abhyAsa vairAgyAbhyAm tat nirodhaH*¹⁰)”. The most critical part of the teachings of the Yoga Sutra is what Patanjali refers to as Antaranga Yoga¹¹- the Yoga

Single minded pursuit of a meaningful enquiry into truth prevents the growth of inner impediments

⁸ Sutra 4.15- *vastu-sAmye citta-bhedAt-tayoH-vibhaktaH panthAH*;

वस्तुसाम्ये चित्तभेदात्तयोर्विभक्तः पन्थाः ॥ १५ ॥

The object being the same it is seen differentially by each person based on the path the person’s mind has come to at this point or with this object.

⁹ Sutra 1.39- *yathAbhimatadhyAnAdvA*; यथाभिमतध्यानाद्वा ॥ ३९ ॥

Deep enquiry that is meaningful and evocative (enables one to become anchored)

¹⁰ Sutra 1.12 - *abhyAsa-vairAgyAbhyAm-tad-nirodhaH*; अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः ॥ १२ ॥

The instrument of consciousness becomes confined to an object when it stays anchored to a practice and ends pleasure seeking

11 Sutra 3.7- *trayam-antarangam pUrvebhyaH*; त्रयमन्तरङ्गं पूर्वेषु; & Sutra 3.8- *tad-api bahirangam nirbljasya*; तदपि बहिरङ्गं निर्बीजस्य

This process of samyama (*dhAraNA, dhyAna, samAdhi*) is more inward, compared to the earlier.

Even that (the 3 levels of *dhAraNA, dhyAna, samAdhi*) is external when compared to *nirblja samAdhi* which has no objects or seeds.

of psychological transformation. Without this transformation the mind is not capable of discriminant observation of oneself and one's world. It is not capable of realizing consciousness-as-such. (The concepts of Antaranga Yoga as taught by Yogacharya Krishnamacharya has been elaborated in the Book "Antaranga Yoga- the foundation of Indian Psychology"- By Raghu Ananthanarayanan with contributions from Dr Anita Balasubramanian, Dr Latha Satish and Dr Anand Paranjpe; (Published by Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram).

How do we do this in today's context?

The context in which the YS was enunciated was a *gurukula* (a small learning community that lives with a *guru* in his *ashram*). This was not only a space dedicated to deep learning and introspection, but it also fostered a *sat-sangha* (a community of truth seekers) among the small group of students who lived in the ashram. We are far away from being able to reconstruct this learning context today. Most people who come to this study are mature adults who are turning away from a world of consumption and individual achievement. The new modes of engagement like web-based learning have taken us further away from the *gurukula*- learning community. The classroom teaching methods are relevant for learning that is impersonal and primarily instrumental in nature.

Through the experimentation in Ritambhara we have found a possible pedagogy that will address the needs of a motivated seeker living in the world that is emerging. These are key anchors of the pedagogy:

1. Inviting a commitment to the single pointed effort (*ekatatva- abhyAsa*) through a study of the Yoga Sutra;
 - a. This begins with the practice of listening (*shrAvaNam*) and contemplation (*mananam*)
 - b. Each person will come from a different stage of inner development, but they are invited to contribute to the central enquiry through self-reflection and questions that arise out of the self-reflection.
 - c. The teaching process rests on the idea that "all learning takes place between the question and the answer". We have drawn this idea from a study of the Upanishads. Almost all the Upanishads relate the process of learning as one in

which the teacher affirms a question as worthy of deep enquiry and encourages contemplation. The teacher engages in a dialogue once the student comes back with a meaningful answer to go further into the enquiry.

- d. This process requires the link with a mentor who can enable an embodied internalization (*nidhidhyAsitavyam*) of the understanding through a regular personal practice.
- e. Enabling a focus on the learning process and not the teacher.

2. Inviting a dialogue where one is engaged with all one's energies, with an open heart (*sakala- sahrudaya- samvAda*) that is filled with deep compassion (*maithri bhAva*¹²).

- a. Developing an attitude of affection and friendliness (*sakhi bhAva*) while being a witness (*sAkshi bhAva*) to one's own inner struggles as well as towards others in the group. Thus, changing the nature of one's own inner dialogue as well as being able to have contemplative conversations with others.
- b. Deepening the understanding of *sakhi bhAva* and *sAkshi bhAva* through the regular practice of *trikoNa samvAda*- a process where three people engage in a contemplative conversation. One person plays the role of the *kartha* (speaker), the second person plays the role of the compassionate listener (*sakhi*) and the third person plays the role of the silent and meditative observer (*sAkshi*). They then interchange roles so that every person experiences all three roles. (We have derived this practice from the Tripura Rahasyam).
- c. Through the dialogue, the manifestations of a mind in *avidya* and the mind that is discovering discrimination (*viveka*¹³) become apparent.

12 Sutra 1.33- maitri karuNA muditopekShANAm sukha duHkha puNyApuNyaviShayANAm bhAvanAtaH cittaprasAdanam; मैत्रीकरुणामुदितोपेक्षाणां सुखदुःखपुण्यापुण्यविषयाणां भावनातश्चित्तप्रसादनम् ॥ ३३ ॥

A tranquil mind holds the following attitudes in respective contexts: When the other person is happy one relates through friendship, when the other person is in pain one relates through compassion, when the other person's actions are enlivening then you share joy, when the other person acts in ways that are toxic you practice equanimity.

13 Sutra 2.26- viveka-khyAtiH-aviplavA hAna-upAyah; विवेकख्यातिरविप्लवा हानोपायः ॥ २६ ॥

- d. This will go through the stages of intellectual engagement (*vitarka*), self-reflective enquiry (*vichAra*, bliss of self-transformation (*Ananda*), and being anchored in consciousness-as-such¹⁴ (*asmita*)
 - e. Internalizing the process of enquiry into the self (*svAdhyAya*) and not focusing on the content of what is learnt
3. Inviting a commitment to listening, giving and receiving gifts, being a context where each member can reshape their inner structure (*upAdAna*) move to a new ground of being (*bhUmi*¹⁵).
- a. This involves a two-fold endeavor- firstly a personal *sAdhana* where a few of the contemplative practices offered by the YS are taken up and followed with intensity; and secondly, sharing their inner processes, both enablers and derailers with the group.
 - a. One's mind transforms from being a disturbed mind (*vikshipta chitta*) to a balanced and attentive mind (*samAhita chitta*). It therefore paves the way for a better understanding of *prakrti* and *puruSha*.
 - b. Co-creating the a community of truth seekers (*sat-sangha*) where a ground of sustained attentiveness (*dhAraNa*) can be sustained and the individual process of

Sustained discrimination and illumined comprehension is the way to end sorrow.

¹⁴ Sutra 1.17 – *vitarka-vichAra-Ananda-asmitA-rUpa-anugamAt-sampragnyAtaH*; वितर्कविचारानन्दास्मितारूपानुगमात्संप्रज्ञातः ॥ १७ ॥

The comprehension or understanding follows these four steps: argument, enquiry, joy at

finding the essence of the substance, identification or integration with the object.

¹⁵ Sutra 3.6- *tasya bhUmiShu viniyogaH*; तस्य भूमिषु विनियोगः

This state of *samyama* requires one to create a ground that can be attained step by step.

self-discipline, enquiry into the self, and surrender (*tapas, svAdhyAya* and *IshvarapraNidhAna*¹⁶) can be nurtured.

Applying the new pedagogy in a web-based course

Last year Ritambhara Ashram was invited by the Hindu University of America to conduct a course called “The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali” (Winter 2021). The course had 17 participants. It comprised of 36hrs of class-room interaction. The participants watched a curated set of videos called “Inner-work Through Yoga”, read relevant portions of the book “The Heart of Yoga” written by Shri Desikachar (The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice – 1999 by T. K. V. Desikachar) and read the blog “Yoga Sutra for Inner work” written by Dr Anita Balasubramanian (<https://yogasutraforinnerwork.wordpress.com/>) and came to the class ready for a “contemplative conversation”. The participants were encouraged to keep a reflective journal going through the course. These videos are a part of the documentation of a 6 day “Research and Contemplation Dialogue” that I had conducted for Sumedhas, Academy for Human Context where I had shared the work I had done with Shri Desikachar and Prof. Pulin Garg.

Dr Anita Balasubramanian a core member of the “Ritambhara Acharya Sangha” co-facilitated the group. We applied all the principles of the pedagogy we had developed in Ritambhara in facilitating this group. At the end of the course, the participants wrote an essay where they introspected on their inner transformation through the course. A cogent narrative of the inner journey of the participants is reflected in their essays. Three of them are quoted here as case studies.

Self-reflective essay 1

¹⁶ Sutra 2.1- tapaH svAdhyAya IsvarapraNidhAnAni kriyAyogaH;
तपःस्वाध्यायेश्चरप्रणिधानानि क्रियायोगः ॥ १ ॥

kriya yoga is Yoga achieved through action. It consists of 3 parts – tapas, svAdhyAya, and IsvarapraNidhAna.

Yoga Sutras Course has been a most unusual yet ultimately a profound learning experience. It took me a while to get used to the rhythm of the classes. Based on my experience of having taken other courses in HUA, I was expecting a more structured learning pedagogy and was initially not able to relate to the experience sharing happening the classes. However, as the classes went by something surprising and profound happened. I had multiple deep realizations that were so vivid and intimate. Moreover, I got greater clarity on multiple spiritual questions I have been investigating for the past many years.

Who am I?

Understanding the nature of self is the ultimate quest in all Indian schools of philosophy and it has also been a quest for me for many years. I have been reading The Bhagavad Gita and following “The Art of Living”, both for over twenty years. Through these and other readings and reflections, I know that Self is lot deeper than the apparent self. I understood the concept the of causeless, formless and timeless Atman through my study of Advaita. I understood *Tat Tvam Asi* and *Aham Brahmsmi*. However, this understanding was at an intellectual level and did not become deep and personal. Over the Yoga Sutras course, I began to understand the nature of Self in a deeper and clearer fashion than what I had ever done before.

The Sankhya framework (which provides the metaphysical foundation for Yoga) provided clarity on the four levels of Self – *Manas* (*Visesha* level), *Ahamkara* (*Avishesha* level), *Buddhi* (*Linga* level) and *Pradhana* (*Alinga* level). Moreover, that we are typically operating at the level of *Manas* and *Indriyas*, which is only 1/4th of the entire self. This multi-level framework helped me better understand the concept of Self and the practices we did across the classes gave me a felt understanding of the same. I realized that the journey is about dissolving the strong hold of this “constructed self” and going deeper to the more subtle but more profound levels. The understanding of the *Buddhi* level was

particularly striking for me; that is the level where the appreciation of beauty and unconditional love lies. I could relate to it that when I am enjoying nature, this is the vast level I am connecting with.

As I better realized that how trapped I was in the narrow “constructed self” I started understanding the cause of my *DuHkha*, my sorrow. The narrow self is insecure and is thus trying too hard to prove itself. From this comes the high ambition and the continual striving for higher and higher goals. From this comes the highs of achievement but also the lows of failure. All of this leads to stress both mental and physical, anger and a constant sense of struggle.

As I started better understanding the deeper sense of Self, I realize that I do not need to put so much pressure on myself. Just “let go” and let the cosmic intelligence do its job. Because I am trying so hard, I am perhaps not grasping the signals nature is sending me. “Shape the flow” or “Go with the flow” has been a constant debate within me for many years, and I am very much a “shape the flow” type of person. I have started to realize the futility of trying to control every situation and having a better balance of “going with the flow”.

This better understanding of self has been very empowering. There is a growing awareness that there are so many levels within us that we are not tapping. As we ‘let go’ so many possibilities of awareness and understanding open up. I have always been fascinated by the topic of human potential, how we are accessing only a small proportion of it, and how we can unlock and live to our fuller potential. I believe the answer to the above profound question lies in understanding and aligning the deeper levels of self. It is by dissolving the narrow sense of self and by aligning the Manas, Ahamkara and Buddhi levels that you get into a state of flow, which is the root of the modern concept of peak performance.

I want to share a recent experience that gave me a sense of deeper layers that exist within us. A few weeks back I visited the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. Normally I would have been very dismissive of the Abstract Art on display. However, as I let go of my assumptions and just tried to be, I was able to relate with the art on display. I realized that many artists were also expressing from a deeper level. I felt it was an engagement beyond my Manas level (the analytical self) and I felt very good about the possibilities.

Some of the statements Raghu ji made in the first few classes suddenly started making sense to me.

- “We are all a cosmic joke. So, we should not take ourselves too seriously!!”
- “Do not get too attached to the mask.”
- “The idea of self is a constructed idea. The only self that transcends is the universal self not the individual self.”
- “All Indian languages are verb based; all Western languages are noun based. There is no “thing” in the world, because everything is constantly changing. Equally my sense of “self”, which is a noun is fictitious!!”

Lessons of Shrimad Bhagavad Gita also start making more sense: “I” am merely a tool for the Divine Will to flow through. And the nature of *Karma: Samatvam* (Equanimity) and *Kaushalam* (Skillfulness in identifying the right action – “Dharma”)

Practices of Yoga

I have been following “The Art of Living” for over two decades so I have been well aware of the practices of Asanas, Pranayama and Dhyana. Yoga Sutras lays out Ashtanga, the eight-fold path, which provides such a brilliant and comprehensive framework for practice.

The following practices resonated most deeply with me and I have started following them:

1. As mentioned above, I have been following the practices of Pranayama and Dhyana for many years and these have been invaluable anchors for me. However, through understanding of Yoga Sutras and the practices in the class, I had some valuable additional insights.

- I found the process of invoking the *Daivika* energy or “the healing force” to be very powerful and the practice impacted me deeply
- *DhAraNa – DhyAna – SamAdhi* process is such a brilliant insight. I believe it can be applied to multiple situations. This is something I would like to understand better and to practice

2. I found Yama and Niyama to be very simple but powerful practices. Of these, *SantoSha* particularly struck a chord with me. As I build a deeper understanding of self, this is a very important change of frame for me - from “insecure overachiever” or “relentless dissatisfaction” to contentment

3. “Let Go” – do not try to control situations too much, go with the flow and trust the divine. This is the concept of *IsvarapraNidhAna*, probably the most important realization and actionable from the course.

4. Observation with calmness and without biases – try to see situations and people as they are, not as you want them to be!!

5. Realization that progress on this path is a step-by-step process. So, do not rush. Just focus on the next step. This is the core of Yoga!!

Conquering hindrances to move forward

Now that I have greater clarity of the path of Yoga, I feel so energized and inspired to progress on this wonderful journey. There are a few hindrances that I have seen in my journey so far and anticipate might be there in future as well.

The main hindrance for me is my past conditioning. There is a strong scripting of a “success formula”, which brings me back to old patterns (high ambition – giving more than 100% - high stress). This leads to

- *PramAda* – Carelessness and lack of awareness of the situation and my actions
- *Avirati* – Sense Gratification keeps on rearing its head
- And occasionally there is *Alasya* – Idleness especially in my practice of *PrANAyama*

As Shri. TKV Desikichar puts in his brilliant book “The Heart of Yoga”, *IsvaraPrANidhAna* or yielding to *Isvara* is the best way for overcoming obstacles in this journey. This realization is seeping in and will be my anchor for the journey ahead.

In conclusion, I want to say how fortunate and grateful I feel that I had the opportunity to take the Yoga Sutras course. I got exposed to the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, a brilliant text that gives such a deep and clear roadmap for progressing on the journey of self-understanding and improvement. I feel my journey with Yoga Sutras has just started. I would like to read it multiple times and continue to imbibe its vast depth of wisdom and actionable insights.

I would also like to thank Raghu ji and Anita ji for their grace and wisdom which helped me and my colleagues in the course have such a profound learning experience. Thank You!!

Self-reflective essay 2

There is so much I have learned from this course and that I have imbibed into my day-to-day life. I will list just a few here that have aided me in my journey of *SvAdhyaya*:

Soaking in the underlying philosophy

First and foremost, there is now a fundamental shift in my perspective of needing to fix myself vs needing to understand myself. This one is so huge because not only am I nicer to myself, but I am also less overwhelmed with this seemingly immense and endless task of needing to fix myself. Look at myself from a *Sakhi and SAKshi bhAva* are the words I constantly remind myself as I find myself being critical of my past or present actions. This coupled with a deep understanding that the same things that make me successful in a particular context, could be causing me *duHkha* in another. That identity is fleeting and only the Self is permanent. Armed with a basic understanding of the Sankhya cosmology and a few specific concepts like the ones listed above have led to me making a consistent effort toward dropping my inner judge.

This basic knowledge has given me the framework and visualization to fall back on whenever the seeds of doubt and brain fog emerge. It has led to a sense of calmness, clarity and stability, a sense of grounding that I was really needing.

Tools to enable Self-orientation

While I have been on a journey of self-discovery and reflection for almost two years, this course took it up a notch for me by giving me very specific tools to enable my inquiries:

Training myself where an alarm goes off each time, I have an intense feeling and I immediately start scanning my body. I try to breathe into the moment and not react immediately.

Second is the format of questions I now ask myself. 1. Where is my feeling coming from vs why am I feeling a certain way. Furthermore, in doing what I am doing, what am I really doing?

And rasa. Observing the subtle things. Getting in touch with my subtle being.

Writing about my dreams and trying to understand the feelings that my subconscious is processing. This has led me down paths of self-inquiry in the last few weeks that I did not even know existed within me.

Understand now that I hold many different archetypes within me and that if I give myself the time to react as opposed to doing it in the spur of the moment based on my *vAsana* conditioning, then I can almost invoke a different archetype and react from there. Better still, my inner intelligence will potentially guide me with the right response and the choice may not be one that I need to make consciously.

I am also really learning to find the joy in each and every thing I do, even if it is a chore. Can I give each and everything so much attention and love that I enjoy it and find joy in it. This means learning to be so present and not to multitask which will be hard with little kids but that is also the fun of it.

The other sutra I am really intrigued by and have been implementing is the one around treating people with joy, friendship, compassion and equanimity depending on their state of mind. It is such a simple little framework but so powerful

Specific meditative tools and practices, e.g. connecting with channeling peak experiences, directing attention to the parts of the mind and body that need healing, noticing the sense. Moreover, most of all, I love the beauty of being able to do this at any point during the day. Furthermore, to not force myself to sit in silence (even though that has automatically started to get easier also). I like having specific exercises to do and ways to direct my thoughts during these practices.

Building my foundation

I have really taken to the concept of *BhUmi*, and nurturing a ground of self upon which to act from. This visual really struck a chord and am working to now burn the *vAsana* and samskara seeds on this *bhUmi* so I can act in a way that's resonant with my inner being

and my buddhi. As my bhUmi stabilizes, I feel calmer, more in touch with myself and also happier/ more satisfied on a day-to-day basis. I am regaining my long-lost confidence. Also, that I can only know my next step. Not the many more after that. I am working to incorporate this knowledge into my psyche and using this to dispel the anxiety that I feel about the future.

Thank you so much Raghu and Anita for your teachings, guidance and for creating this beautiful space. I feel very lost as to what I will do after this class and without having regular meetings and discussions with you, but also empowered by the ideas, tools and foundations you have given me.

With deep and eternal gratitude.

Self-reflective essay 3

Insights into my journey of *svādhyāya* (contemplative self-enquiry) through the lens of the Yoga Sutras

Coming into this class, I was at an ultimate low point in my life emotionally. So Desikachar's observation on the importance of change to our personal growth, in his book: Heart of Yoga, really resonated with me. He says: "Yet something very personal and essential has to happen for us at the right time, and it has to touch us so deeply that we suddenly really want to pause, consider, and change the course of our actions." (p. 95). This, in a nutshell, encapsulates where I was when I started this course.

My life has long been defined by emotional attachments and always being there for people. I go the extra 5 miles or 20 miles for family and friends, rather than the traditional extra mile. However, despite this, several close friendships and family relationships

crumbled for reasons beyond my comprehension. This series of events and losses led to perpetual fear and anxiety on who or what I may lose next.

My state of mind was exactly as described in Sutra 1.31 - without anchor, in pain and physical distress:

duHkha-daurmanasya-angamejayatva-shvAsa-prashvAsA vikShepa-saha-bhuvaH

दुःखदौर्मनस्याङ्गमेजयत्वश्वासप्रश्वासा विक्षेपसहभुवः ॥ १.३१ ॥

A mind without anchor causes distress, pain, physical unsteadiness and disturbed breathing. (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

Having invested so much of myself in these relationships, when these began to crumble, it shook me to my very foundation. Understandably, this affected me both emotionally, manifesting in extreme depression, as well as physically, resulting in a variety of health issues.

However, after a few weeks of discussions, viewing the videos, and doing the readings for this class, I slowly began to understand that I was, in fact, displaying classic signs of *duHkha*, as Sutra 2.15 states.

pariNAma-tApa-samskAra dukhhaiH-guNa-vRtti-virodhAt-ca duHkham-eva sarvam vivekinaH

परिणामतापसंस्कारदुःखैर्गुणवृत्तिविरोधाच्च दुःखमेव सर्वं विवेकिनः ॥ २.१५ ॥

DuHkha is caused by change, longing, conditioning and conflict among the inherent nature of the *guNA*. For a discriminating person, all experience (any contact with the world, or any experience in awake, sleep or dream state) is *duHkha*. (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

A sense of lethargy dragged me down making even daily activities challenging. Moreover, any contact with the world produced some *duHkha* in me, to the point that even daily activities were challenging. In other words, I had plunged into a state of *tamas*, which was very uncharacteristic for me. I had always been a cheerful, action-oriented person until this time.

I mourned the loss of my past happiness, a form of *abhinivesa*, and constantly dwelt on that elusive happiness that I felt I was blessed with in my youth, a form of *apariharam*. Instead of being happy with what I had in the present, and making the best of every situation, instead I focused exclusively on the past.

I stopped talking to family and friends, as any contact evoked memories that were too painful to confront. Wanting to avoid painful memories I had withdrawn. This was my *dveSha*, retreating from anything that produced pain.

Moreover, being dragged down by the quicksand of my emotions, I could not figure a way out. Being reactive to the world purely at the *manas* level then, and shaped by my *samskaras*, my *asmita* was causing insurmountable *duHkha*. Moreover, covered by my veil of *avidya* my path to resolution was obscured. It became a vicious cycle of grief and pain feeding into my *duHkha* and amplifying it over and over again as Sutra 2.3 points out.

avidyA-asmitA-rAga-dveSha-abhiniveshAH kleshAH

अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः क्लेशाः ॥ २.३ ॥

Sutra 2.3: Incorrect knowing, self-constructs, pleasure seeking, avoidance of pain and reinforcing one's sense of self out of fear and insecurity are the causes of pain and distress. (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

It was a few weeks into this class that I found it was incredibly valuable to reflect on the question: where is this coming from? We had talked about this in Antaranga Yoga as well,

but it took some time to understand that the 'why me?' question I had been grappling with all this time was entirely futile. I began to identify that I had solely been governed by my senses, responding and being reactive to triggers. It was like being on a tiny boat on a stormy sea, buffeted on every side by the winds of change that seemed to blindsides me at every turn. Shaped thus by my samskaras, my *asmita* had been built on identification and reaction to the external world. Applying Sutra 3.18 helped me examine patterns in my life and where my thinking and reactions were coming from. Recognizing that I was in a state of *duHkha* caused by operating at the *manas-indriya* level, was my first major realization.

samskAra-sAkShAt karaNAt-pUrva-jAti-gnyAnam

संस्कारसाक्षात्करणात्पूर्वजातिज्ञानम् ॥ ३.१८ ॥

If I can look at my patterns and understand them clearly, I can understand its roots. (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

Through the practice of directing my inquiry inward and watching my reactions and responses to events and experiences, I have begun attempting to embrace the 'now', whether painful or joyful. I am trying to free myself from the crippling anxiety that my samskaras have instilled in me, to observe my fears, acknowledge them, and choose not to follow them down into the depths of anxiety that almost drowned me. I now know that I have been grieving for the loss of my past self. This *abhinivesa* is tied to a profound grief over the dismantling of my entire belief system up to this point. Moreover, attached to this structure, my *Ashraya and Alambana* that I'd so carefully built up, it is no wonder that I have had a hard time letting go of my *asmita*. This dismantling may be painful for a while longer, but it is essential to my growth and development, so my dependence on others can decrease as I get in touch with, and more situated in, my true self. Also, I came into this class already familiar with the *sAkshi bhAva*, but employing my *sakhi bhAva*, and

viewing myself with compassion, has been enormously helpful. The exercise of healing my present pain with support from my past self situated in an enlivening experience is something I turn to again and again, and has been an incredibly healing experience as well.

Practicing these techniques, I now feel a sense of freedom, at least some of the time, in knowing that problems may arise but I have a choice (and have always been exercising choice) regarding how to react to them. I am now beginning to accept that loss is part of life, and that is ok. I cannot go back in time, I cannot change what has happened, or change what is about to happen, so I need to be present in the moment.

I also am coming to grips with the idea that I cannot afford to derive happiness from the external world anymore. This was literally killing me slowly. My sense of value had, for too long, been tied to those I love. So this was the seed I need to burn, to stop from growing further. So this major discovery that I needed to stop depending on others for strength, meant that I had to reach in and connect with the strength within me, my purusha, for that is the only thing that remains unchanged and unwavering. The story of the Dalai Lama's words, in fact, really struck a chord with me: "Even when we have physical hardships, we can be very happy." So I needed to be happy in the present moment and practice *santoSham*, so that I can approach *Ananda* within as Sutra 2.42 suggests. True happiness requires that I change the way I view my experiences.

santoShAt-anuttamaH sukha-lAbhaH

संतोषादनुत्तमः सुखलाभः ॥ ४२ ॥

Through practice of inner contentment an unparalleled happiness is experienced. (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

However, most importantly, I also realized that experiencing this catastrophic stripping away of my support systems was exactly the catalyst I needed to direct me inward. This,

however, requires a certain amount of detachment. I can still be loving and helpful, but I need to do so without expectation of reciprocation or recognition. In aspiring to *vairAgya* and *Ananda* then, I intend to turn to a combination of practices (*abhyAsa*) to quieten my mind and achieve clarity and stillness within (*vairagya*), as Sutra 1.12 highlights.

abhyAsa-vairAgyAbhyAm-tad-nirodhaH

अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः ॥ १२ ॥

The instrument of consciousness becomes confined to an object when it stays anchored to a practice and ends pleasure seeking

These practices for me begin with, and include, *dhyAna*:

dhyAna-heyaH- tad-vrttayaH

ध्यानहेयास्तद्वृत्तयः ॥ २.११ ॥

Through the practice of *dhyAna* the seeds are depotentised.

yathAbhimatadhyAnAdvA

यथाभिमतध्यानाद्वा ॥ १.३९ ॥

Deep enquiry that is meaningful and evocative (enables one to become anchored). (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

Sutras 2.11 and 1.39 on *dhyana* resonate with me, as study and reflection are deeply appealing to me. Books and learning, music and dance are my inspirations, as are chanting and studying our texts and scriptures. I have been steeping myself in these for a few years, and I intend to allow this *dharana* to ripen so that I can burn and depotentize the seeds of my attachments. It is only through continued meaningful inquiry that I can give myself the time and space to approach more sustained states of *dhyana* and *vairagya* eventually.

I plan to supplement this with a steady pranayama practice and kriya yoga, as these serve as doors to deeper states within me, and which I have found to be incredibly powerful. However, even more powerful have been the practices we have done in class, of revisiting enlivening peak moments, and inviting our *duHkha* to participate in these moments so we can burn away its potency. These practices have evoked shifts in me that I did not imagine were possible. I was profoundly moved by the exercise we did, when our former selves rooted in states of contentment were called on to heal our present wounds. So I have started using this technique regularly as the need arises.

Nature and animals also offer me infinite solace, since they do not hold the *citta vritti* that I need to break away from, per Sutra 1.37.

Vitaragavisayam va cittam

वीतरगविषयं वा चित्तम् ॥ ३७ ॥

Interacting with an object or person who is beyond the pulls and pushes of attraction and repulsion, has a beneficial effect on us. (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

Moreover, finally, I will continue to turn to Bhakti, which I have leaned on most of my life. While I use name and form to converse with *Isvara*, I believe that there is only *nirguna Isvara*, and that this energy is in everything and everyone. I still need the props of name and form for my daily practice, and I am now fine with that. Surrendering to *Isvara*, to me, is the ultimate act of letting go. As Sutra 1.23 states:

Ishvara-praNidhAnAd-vA

ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा ॥ २३ ॥

The other way is surrendering to *Ishvara*, i.e. offering oneself to the divine with a deep sense of humility and surrender. (Yoga Sutra for Inner Work)

This path of *svAdhyAya and IsvarapraNidhAna* has already produced a profound shift in me in a mere 3 months, and I have experienced flashes of insight at levels I have never been able to access before. I can honestly say that I would never have believed it if anyone had told me then, that I would see such a tremendous transformation in such a short time. Through stepping back and consciously watching my reactions with compassion as a *sakhi* and *sAkshi* I now choose my reaction to events. Of course I still oscillate between operating at the *manas-indriya* level and reaching deeper states, but I aspire to center myself more firmly in a state of receiving and offering experiences without expectation, judgement or victimhood, and maintain some level of equanimity. At least now I have the tools to pull myself out when required. This is a long road, I know, but I am taking it one step at a time and trusting the process. Whether I can attain this in this lifetime or another, I know this is the only true road to *Ananda*.

Part 3

Validating the process with Dr Anand Paranjpe and Dr Kundan Singh

I had requested Dr Anand Paranjpe¹⁷ and Dr Kundan Singh¹⁸ who are helping the Hindu University of America to develop a concentration in Yoga Psychology to be my mentors and sounding board as I conducted the course. The key insights that came up through our discussions:

1. The field of psychology has constantly looked eastward to gain insights and incorporate them into the knowledge base. However, Yoga Psychology as enunciated in the Yoga Sutra is not accorded the status of a primary resource from which knowledge is being mined.
2. This could be because of three reasons: firstly, the distance between philosophy and psychology; secondly, the reliance on validation of hypothesis using measurement and other forms of third person research; thirdly, the continuing attitude of the colonial gaze where it seems legitimate to mine Indic sources for insight, and then digest them.
3. There are areas of convergence between Yoga Psychology and Western Psychology as well as divergences. The discussion on inner constriction and conditioned habits and

¹⁷ **Dr. Anand Paranjpe** obtained his Ph.D. at Pune University and conducted post-doctoral research at Harvard University under a Fulbright and Smith-Mundt grant. In 1967 he started teaching at Simon Fraser University in Canada, where he is currently Emeritus Professor of Psychology and Humanities. His major publications include “Theoretical psychology: The meeting of East and West” (Plenum, 1984), “Self and identity in modern psychology and Indian thought” (Plenum, 1998). He co-edited with Professors K.R. Rao and Ajit Dalal the “Handbook of Indian Psychology” (Cambridge University Press, India, 2008). His latest book is K.R. Rao and Anand C. Paranjpe, “Psychology in the Indian tradition” (Delhi: Springer, 2016; Delhi: DK World, 2017).

¹⁸ **Dr. Kundan Singh** holds a doctorate in Humanities with a Concentration in East-West Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, California. After having served as a Core Faculty at Sofia University for close to a decade where he taught at the doctoral level, Kundan Singh joined the Hindu University of America as a Core Doctoral Faculty.

He has co-authored a book with Krishna Maheshwari titled *Making Children Hindu phobic: A Critical Review of McGraw Hill’s World History Textbooks* (2018) and written another work titled *The Evolution of Integral Yoga: Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda* (2008). He has also published several papers and book chapters on psychology, science, relativism, Indian psychology, and post-modernism.

(*klesha*, *samskAra* and *vAsana*) has correspondence between the two systems. The way to end the suffering caused by the inner constrictions diverges. Yoga Psychology relies on refining the instruments of perception and turning the refined instrument inward. Many methods are given for the process of cleansing and refining the psyche. Many ways are described for contemplation, self-reflection, and introspection. Signposts on this inward journey are described to guide the contemplative process till the final goal of Self-transcendence (*kaivalya*) is reached.

4. Western Psychology is about the other. Knowledge is gathered through third person research. It is meant to be a body of knowledge that equips the therapist, counsellor, or coach to “act upon” the client. Yoga Psychology is a practice aimed at understanding one’s own psyche and through this understanding to realize Self. Its methods are psycho-spiritual and introspective. However, some the ideas presented by Freud like regression have some correspondence with practices like reversing the process of manifesting oneself (*pratiprasava*) recommended in the Yoga Sutra. Jungian methods of evoking archetypal energies are compatible with the idea of discovering one’s personal divinity (*ishtadevata*). Moreover, the processes of introspection suggested by Carl Rogers are similar to self-reflection and self-discovery (*svAdhyAya*).
5. Western Psychology is distanced from philosophy and tries hard to be accepted as a science. Therefore, it does not enable the average individual to engage with life as it unfolds, nor does it enable self-reflection. Patanjali Yoga Sutras on the other hand brings together a view of the cosmos, the world one lives in and one’s own psyche in a coherent way. It concerns itself with a person’s *duHkha* (suffering) but suggests psycho-spiritual practices through which the person can end *duHkha*, and then discover *Ananda* (bliss) and finally come to rest in *puruSha* (Consciousness-as-such).
6. The Yoga Sutra defines 5 levels of psyche: *kshipta*- the mind that is instinctual and reactive (therefore incapable of any understanding); *mUDha*- the mind that is unresponsive and depressed (therefore incapable of any understanding); *vikshipta*- the mind that flits into and out of attentiveness (therefore capable of self-reflection, but not in a sustained manner); *ekAgrata*- the mind that is capable of attentiveness and *nirodha*- the mind capable of total absorption.
7. The transformation of a mind that is distracted to a mind capable of sustained meditative attention was evoked in the aspirant (*sAdhaka*) through the aspirant’s engagement with a trustworthy master (*Apta vachana*) and dialogue in a *sangha* (a community of practice).

8. The current ways of imparting knowledge are suited for learning about our material universe. They are not adequate for enabling an inner journey into a space that is intangible.
9. The context in which this transformative process was taught was a *gurukula* (a small learning community that lives with a *guru* in his *ashram*). The fundamental purpose of the learning was to create *adhikAra* i.e., a deep ethical and spiritual foundation from which a person could play roles in society and contribute to a dharmic unfolding of society.
10. Current modes of teaching are not aimed at transformation, they are tuned to gaining capabilities and “monetizing” them. They do not focus the cultivation of the inner faculties of a person, nor their ethical maturation.
11. Therefore, the discovery of a method of teaching that focuses on the practice Antaranga Yoga in a way that is transformative, and experiential is an urgent need.

Conclusion

Based on the discussions with Anand ji and Kundan ji, Anita and I felt that we had discovered a new and meaningful way of teaching the Yoga Sutra. The responses of the participants as they went through the course, the nature of the questions they came up with, the quality of their journaling as well as the final essays they wrote convinced us that a significant self-transformation had been experienced by them.

As we work further with this way of enabling people to learn the Yoga Sutras, introspect on them and live by their insights a robust pedagogy that emulates the gurukula system will evolve.

