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Goals of Yoga

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The ultimate goal of Yoga is moksha (liberation), although the exact definition of what form this takes depends on the philosophical or theological system with which it is conjugated.

According to Jacobsen, “Yoga has five principal meanings:

Yoga, as a disciplined method for attaining a goal;

Yoga, as techniques of controlling the body and the mind;

Yoga, as a name of one of the schools or systems of philosophy (darśana);

Yoga, in connection with other words, such as “hatha-, mantra-, and laya-,” referring to traditions specialising in particular techniques of yoga;

Yoga, as the goal of Yoga practice.

According to David Gordon White, from the 5th century CE onward, the core principles of “yoga” were more or less in place, and variations of these principles developed in various forms over time:

Yoga, is a meditative means of discovering dysfunctional perception and cognition, as well as overcoming it for release from suffering, inner peace and salvation; illustration of this principle is found in Hindu texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and Yogasutras, in a number of Buddhist Mahāyāna works, as well as Jain texts;

Yoga, as the raising and expansion of consciousness from oneself to being coextensive with everyone and everything; these are discussed in sources such as in Hinduism Vedic literature and its Epic Mahābhārata, Jainism Praśamaratiprakarana, and Buddhist Nikaya texts;

Yoga, as a path to omniscience and enlightened consciousness enabling one to comprehend the impermanent (illusory, delusive) and permanent (true, transcendent) reality; examples are found in Hinduism Nyaya and Vaisesika school texts as well as Buddhism Mādhyamaka texts, but in different ways;

Yoga, as a technique for entering into other bodies, generating multiple bodies, and the attainment of other supernatural accomplishments; these are, states White, described in Tantric literature of Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as the Buddhist Sāmaññaphalasutta; James Mallinson, however, disagrees and suggests that such fringe practices are far removed from the mainstream Yoga’s goal as meditation-driven means to liberation in Indian religions.

White clarifies that the last principle relates to legendary goals of “yogi practice”, different from practical goals of “yoga practice,” as they are viewed in South Asian thought and practice since the beginning of the Common Era, in the various Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophical schools.

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