# Consciousness via Yoga: Q and A with Stories

## AUM

## About Consciousness

### Why Should I Care About Consciousness, Spirituality, or Yoga?

Reader: Consciousness is not a scientific term. Spirituality is a vague term. I see Yoga as an exercise. Why should I spend my time on these topics?

Author: **Everyone cares about the difference between the life and death.** The consciousness is the difference between a living person in this moment and his dead body in next moment. This book collects information about consciousness from various sources, pieces them together, and presents a Unified Theory of Consciousness. It helps us understand several aspects of consciousness.

Science is in early stages of understanding consciousness. **However, humanity has spent millions of man-lives on studying the consciousness.** This collective knowledge is stored in the philosophy and religion. It is called Spirituality. We will study spirituality to understand the consciousness. In this book, we will define the term ‘Spirituality’. We will see that we can be spiritual in different ways and reach the same goal. As Shri Krishna, Lord Buddha and many other great men have said, wise men take the path of spirituality.

There are several methods, ways, and practices in spirituality. Yoga is one of them. Yoga uses various physical poses/asana, but Yoga is not a physical poses. **Only when a student takes a physical pose with awareness, he is doing Yoga. Such a practice of Yoga leads us to experience of consciousness.** This book describes the process of Yoga. It explains “how” it leads to consciousness.

**Reader: What is consciousness?**

### What Is Consciousness?

Author: **When many great men were asked the same question, they indicate the answer with a pure silence. When pressed for verbal answer, some great men answered “Not that, not that, not that”.** These may be the best answers. However, they do not help us to understand consciousness. Hence, we have to struggle in our normal ways and try to understand it.

Any discussions about consciousness become abstract and very difficult to read. **Therefore, in this book, we will use concrete methods of Yoga to explain consciousness. We will see various stories that have consciousness as a main character!** It will keep discussions easy to understand and interesting.

The information presented here is very old. However, the way of expression, language, and interpretations are new, which makes it little easy to understand the concepts. It is up to an individual to discover consciousness for himself by experimenting with it.

Science and Spirituality have searched the answer of this question. Yet, we do not have a complete understanding of the consciousness. However, we do have bits and pieces of information about consciousness. They represent various angles to look at it. This approach has severe limitations. Please read them as well.

**In general, the word consciousness refers to one's awareness.** This awareness may be of thoughts, memories, feelings, sensations, or environment. They are objects of awareness. **When an individual knows that his attention is on a particular object, he is aware or conscious of it.** In that moment, his consciousness is witnessing that particular object. It is possible for consciousness to be aware, without any object in it.

**Here are the laws of consciousness.**

1. Our mind and consciousness are the same. **When mind becomes clear of objects, it witnesses the consciousness.** When consciousness entertains objects, gets involved in them, and then forgets its awareness, it becomes the mind. **Thus, the mind is an impure form of consciousness.** 
   * Here purity of mind is defined as follows: the mind is aware about an object in it but it is not reacting to it. There is no aversion or cravings for anything. Mind is balanced and it is not attached to anything.
   * People tend to get disturbed by thoughts, control or avoid them, or fight against mind to stop having thoughts. It does not work and it creates more misery. Knowing that ‘consciousness becomes mind’ will help them to be aware of thoughts. Thereafter, it will allow those thoughts to come and go, without being disturbed by them.
2. **The mind (as a form of consciousness) exists all over the body.** **It creates sensations all over the body.** 
   * We can easily verify this statement. When there is a pain in any body part, we aware of it. Thus, the consciousness exists all over the body and therefore mind too exists all over the body.A strong emotion generated in mind (say, anger) makes changes to the entire body.
3. **Our sense organs function only when consciousness wishes to use them.** 
   * Our sense organs ‘take in’ their objects because of this consciousness. For example, ears listen to music. The ears can 'take in’ the sound because of ‘ear-consciousness’ in the ears. The consciousness works behinds the senses and enables them to function. Consciousness, using the five sense organs and mind as a sense organ, continuously generate the sensations in entire body.
4. **The consciousness is dependent upon sense organs and mind (as a sense organ) to generate sensations in the body. The reason of sensation is irrelevant to consciousness.** 
   * The sense organs generate various sensations. For example, skin generates a sensation of hot or cold. The light that falls on eyes is an external reason, which generated sensations. The reason of sensation can be internal as well. A mind can create an image and create similar sensation. Thus, mind becomes internal reason of sensations. Consciousness does not care about the reason of sensation.
5. **Intensity of sensation depends upon then purity of mind.**
   * When we are less conscious about those sensations, the sensations appear gross, painful, and stationary. As our mind becomes pure, (we become conscious about the sensations) they become fine, pleasant, and shifting from one point to other point in body.
6. **Consciousness has no mass associated with it. It works as a field, like a magnetic field with single pole (monopole magnet).** 
   * Consciousness holds our body and mind in itself and allows them to function.All the mass in body is made from five life-elements. For example, blood is made from water life-element and bones are made from earth life-element. These elements are made from energy. Energy and consciousness work together to create the body. Consciousness creates the body using these five life-elements of energy.
7. **Consciousness is an indivisible.**
   * Consciousness has no mass and it acts like a field. Even if a part of body is removed, the field remains intact and still can generate sensation. Body is made from five life-elements. Even if there is no earth life-element, the space life-element still remains, and it will generate sensations. Medical science calls it ‘Phantom Limb’.
8. **Any sensation has the two components.** First component is the consciousness, which allows us to be aware of that sensation. The second component is a bodily component. It is made from energy and five life-elements.
   * Body is physical. It needs energy to move. Every sensation to work, there has to be some energy associated with it.
   * The sensations of fire life-element are hot or cold. Sensations of earth life-element are hard or soft. Sensation of air life-element is of vibrations or moving. Using the sensation types, we can identify five different planes in the body.
9. **The consciousness within our body is made up of trillions of superfine conscious particles.**
   * The word consciousness does not give correct understanding of its real nature. In English, we have many words like richness or ripeness etc. The richness, in terms of money comes from collecting millions of cents. The ripeness in fruit comes from every particle of fruit being ripe**. Similarly, the consciousness within our body comes from trillions of superfine conscious particles.**
10. **The trillions of superfine particles of consciousness are not stationary within body.**
    * There is always a movement of these particles. They move from top of the head to the rest of the body. They loosely associate (stay with, or attach, or hold) with the particles of the body. Whenever there is a sensation in that body part, they are released from that part, and they go back to the top of head.
11. **When the conscious particles movement increases, we feel alive.**
    * The dullness or freshness we feel is the direct result of this flow. For example, when we get out of room and feel the fresh air, we feel fresh too. The contact of air with skin and breath creates sensations, that increases the flow of conscious particles to top of head, and then we feel fresh, better than before, and conscious.
12. **The rate at which the conscious particles flow depends upon the purity of mind.** 
    * When mind is not pure, the conscious field becomes viscous. It slows down the conscious particle flow. The result is that person becomes less aware of his thoughts, feelings, emotions, sensations, actions, and surrounding.
    * If we keep on having a sensation of same type for a long period, that body part becomes numb. When there is a sensation, conscious particles are released from that body part and they go to the top of head. If the mind is not pure, then the conscious particle flow is very slow and it takes longer for conscious particles to reach to that body part. Therefore, in the meantime, we lose sensations from that part of body**.** If the mind is pure, then conscious particles can flow easily, and then a person can hold a sensation in that body part for a longer time.
13. **Consciousness stores and re-plays most effective thoughts or feelings to create sensations.**
    * When thoughts, emotions, and feelings are present in mind, they create sensations all over the body. The sensations release the conscious particles, and they go to the top of head. Consciousness uses this capability of mind to create sensations all over the body to create sensations.Consciousness, using memory, stores the most effective thoughts, emotions, and feelings, which can create strong sensations. Whenever it wants, it re-plays the same thoughts, emotions, or feelings, and creates sensations for itself. For this reason, we cannot stop mind and keep having thoughts and feelings in our mind.
14. **Consciousness is impartial to the type of sensation.**
    * As we know, sensations can be pleasurable or painful**. Consciousness does not care about pleasure or pain of body or mind.** As long as it gets some sensation, it fulfills need of consciousness for sensations.
15. **We react to a sensation, without being aware of the reaction.** 
    * If sensation is pleasurable, we want it to continue. This is a craving reaction. If sensation is painful, we want it to stop. This is an aversion reaction. For every sensation, there is a reaction. The type of reaction does not matter to consciousness.
16. **Reaction to sensation is the critical feedback loop.**
    * As long as the reaction exits, it gives feedback to consciousness that this particular thought or feeling is working to generate sensations. Without the reaction, consciousness cannot get feedback, as if the electric circuit is not complete. In that case, mind stops running that thought or feeling. Thus, not reacting to sensations generated by a thought or feeling is the only way to stop it from running forever and make mind pure.
17. **Amount of breath we take in is directly proportional to purity of mind.** 
    * For example, when we are angry, we breathe harder. It is visible indicator, which tells us that mind has become impure. Being aware of breath calms mind and allows it to become pure. When mind becomes completely pure, breath stops.
18. **Energy converts into consciousness, which increase level of consciousness in body.**
    * The food and breath converts into energy. There is an additional storehouse of energy at the base of spine. From there, the energy is sent to all over the body.
    * Most of the energy is consumed in maintaining sensations. A small part of the energy goes from base of spine to top of head. There, energy converts into consciousness. This additional consciousness increases level of consciousness and it helps mind to become pure. This process becomes a cyclic process. It allows us to go to higher level of consciousness. It has more awareness and pure mind as compared to earlier level.
19. **Consciousness is the ultimate medicine.**
    * When consciousness comes down from top of the head, it has medicine like effect on body and mind. It can remove the pain associated with injury and it can accelerate the bodily processes that fix the body part.
20. **Consciousness can contract to a small body part or expand beyond body.**
    * Consciousness can be aware of an extremely minute detail like a tiniest sensation in the body and nothing else. This is contraction property of consciousness. Similarly, consciousness can expand exponentially and be aware of everything that is around it. This is expansion property of consciousness.

The limitations of above definition are as follows:

The story of “Blind men and Elephant” was developed to help us see that we cannot grasp consciousness in its totality. The story shows that few blind men cannot correctly understand the reality of the elephant. **The question we do not see is - can few men with good senses, like eyesight, smell, hearing, touch, etc. understand what an elephant is?** They may come up with very long description of elephant, but only an elephant understands itself! Similarly, when we experience consciousness, we understand it. One more difficulty is that the story has five blind men. However, there is just one person (myself or yourself etc.), who is experiencing various angles of consciousness over a long time Meanwhile, he start to doubt or forget the earlier experience.

Imagine a merry-go-round that does not stop. Only way to get on to it is to find a suitable spot and jump on it while it is moving! Once you are on it, you can easily move around. **Learning about consciousness is similar to getting on to a merry-go-round that does not stop.** We describe consciousness using other concepts, which in turn, need consciousness to define them. It quickly becomes confusing. Like the merry-go-round that does not stop, you cannot figure out the meaning of these terms. The only way to break this pattern is to jump on the merry-go-round. It means, we need to do few exercises, experiments, trial-and-error, etc. and experience the consciousness. Once you experience it, you can easily understand various aspects of consciousness.

We cannot prove or disprove anything about consciousness using standard scientific methods. **However, we can independently verify the correctness of these statements based on our experience and experiments.**

Reader: What is a scientific view on consciousness?

### What Is The Scientific View on Consciousness?

Author: **Science has focused on brain, its chemistry, and neurology to understand human behavior.** Science knows that certain parts of brain have a specific effect on a particular body part. For example, the cerebellum is located at the back of the head. Its function is to coordinate voluntary muscle movements and to maintain posture, balance, and equilibrium. These type of co-relations are proven scientifically.

**Science has many theories related to consciousness.** These theories are not proven yet, but they give an angle to think about consciousness. A biological aspect of consciousness is - why we chose to pay attention to certain information and we ignore other information. For example, when we are hungry, we tend to notice food items or have thoughts about food.

There are millions of activities happen in and around our body at any time. Each organ of body is connected to brain, so brain has flood of information coming to it at every moment. Why does our brain choses to focus on one activity? How it decides which information to focus?

**The Attention Schema Theory (AST) suggests that consciousness arises a response to this flood of information. Our brain evolved a system for processing a few select signals at the expense of others. Science calls it consciousness.** Therefore, as per AST, our consciousness is a product of this evolution over billions of years. AST is one of theories that are not proven until now.

Finding out which part of brain controls which organ or function is described has “Easy Problem of Consciousness”. **“The Hard Problem of Consciousness” is why and how we are conscious.** In other words, it refers to finding out why and how humans are different from the robots. Why and how are we conscious? **Science does not have answer to this question.**

Reader: Why is it hard to detect scientifically consciousness?

### Why Is It Hard To Detect Scientifically Consciousness?

Author: **Science needs proof that can be verified. Science needs an observer and something to be observed.** How does a scientist prove that an animal is conscious? Of course, we can induce some stimuli, as offer food to an animal and it will react to it. We are the observer and animal is being observed. Then we can determine that it is alive and conscious. That is the way of science. It breaks down quickly when we try to prove that we consciousness.

**How can I prove to you that I am conscious?** The only way I can prove to you that I am conscious, is by detecting your presence, recognize you, and then reacting to it. However, there are many problems with this statement. If I could not recognize you or acknowledge your presence, then I cannot prove to you that I am conscious. It is possible that I could be pre-occupied with something, say I am rushing towards rest room, and I could not see you in that moment. When I chose to be busy with something, that is, focused on one thing, I decided to ignore other things. It does not mean that I am not conscious. **Therefore, the processes of detection, recognition, and response do not mean consciousness.** In the same way, a robot can detect your presence, recognize you, and acknowledge it. Obviously, a robot is not conscious and I am not a robot.

In this context of science, what is the consciousness? There is no answer. **If we design an extremely efficient robot that mimics you, then science cannot differentiate between you and robot. This is the reason science cannot deal with consciousness.** Science cannot prove existence of consciousness or it cannot disprove it. Any assertions about consciousness become a pseudo-science or non-science. Scientist let religion and philosophy handle it.

Reader: Can you explain difference between Science and Yoga related to consciousness?

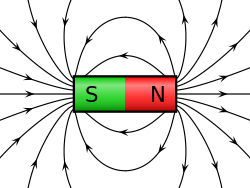
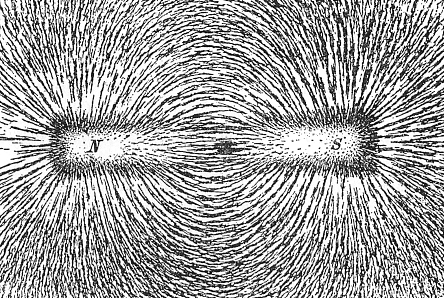
Can You Explain Difference Between Science and Yoga Related to Consciousness?

Author: Even though science cannot offer any guidance about consciousness, humanity has worked on this problem for as long as it exits. Yoga is one of these branches of studies that primarily focus on consciousness. **Science and Yoga differ from each other in many ways. It makes us wonder, if they are talking about the same term.**

1. Science is searching with an external observer of consciousness. In Yoga, our consciousness itself becomes the observer, and it observes our body and mind.
2. **Science is looking for consciousness in neutron cells in the brain. For Yoga, consciousness acts like a magnetic field. This field is all over the body.**
3. **Science sees body as made of bones, blood, tissues, etc. made of 128 elements from periodic table.** Yoga sees ourselves as body-mind-energy-consciousness. **For Yoga, energy creates five life-elements – earth, water, fire, air, and space. Our body is made of these five elements.** The consciousness, acting as a field, holds all of it together.
4. **Science sees mind as active mind or subconscious mind.** Yoga says that the consciousness in our body becomes ego and intellect. Together, they produce mind. Mind creates desires. **Therefore, for Yoga, mind and consciousness are essentially same. The difference is that mind is impure consciences, with its desires. When mind becomes pure, without any desires, it becomes consciousness.**
5. According to science, the subconscious mind as storehouse of the suppressed desires. Yoga sees deep-rooted mind patterns or habits stored in the consciousness (Sankhara) as storehouse.
6. **Science cannot fix anything that is in subconscious mind. Yoga is designed to clean the deep-rooted mind patterns.**
7. **Science helps you with states of consciousness like normal, dullness, illness, coma, or dead. Medical science is extremely valuable in sickness**. At the same time, when you are not sick, there is not much for a good doctor to do with you. Yoga can help you after you are well. **Yoga deals with states of consciousness beyond normal states.**
8. For science, when body dies, the mind and subconscious die with it. For Yoga, the deep-rooted mind patterns are carried along with energy and consciousness to the next life.
9. Science has distinction between living and non-living beings based on its consciousness. For Yoga, all living and non-living beings are conscious. The non-living things as conscious will surprise the reader. Nevertheless, that is one of the main assertion of Yoga.
10. **Science takes reductionist approach, meaning it tries to isolate consciousness to specific details that we focus our attention.** For example, we are conscious of food nearby because we are hungry. **For Yoga, contraction and expansion are properties of consciousness.**
11. Reader: After reading this, it does feel like science and Yoga are using the word consciousness with different meaning. **Can you explain consciousness as a field?**

### Can You Explain Consciousness as a Field?

Author: We know that every magnet has a magnetic field surrounding it. We can see the magnet by our eyes, but magnetic field is invisible. Magnetic field has magnetic field lines. We know a magnetic field is generated when electricity passes through wires. We call it electromagnetic field, meaning that field depends upon electricity. Stronger the electric current passing through wire, stronger is the magnetic field.

For the sake of comparison with electromagnetic field, let us call consciousness as “conscious field”. The conscious field is similar to the electromagnetic field. Instead of north and south poles of electromagnetic field, the conscious field has just one pole – one at the top of the head. In Yoga, we call it Sahastrar. Just as electromagnetic field needs supply of energy, Sahastrar also needs supply of energy. This energy supply is provided by Muladhar Chakra. Energy flows from bottom of spine towards top of head. Due to constant supply of energy, the conscious field is created and sustained.

The conscious field is not a static or at-rest field. There is always an activity happening within it. There are two distinct activities are happening at Sahastrar. First, it is responsible for taking in the energy and converts it to consciousness. In Yoga, we focus on energy, and raise it to the top of the head, and we get consciousness as a result. This generated consciousness spreads all over the body. A strong energy center produces strong conscious field and vice-versa. The correct term to describe the conscious field would be “energy-conscious field” but for simplicity, we will use term conscious field. Second, Sahastrar also attracts or pulls the consciousness from all over the body. This creates a sort of flow of consciousness within the body. This action of consciousness being pulled or attracted towards Sahastrar is documented in Yoga. It leads to experience of Samadhi.

Normally, the flow of consciousness towards the head is very hard to feel. When we do breathing exercises called as Pranayama, with pure mind, we being to notice this flow.

Yoga says that the conscious field comes first and body is secondary. In other words, the conscious field arranges our body to suit itself. The conscious field creates and holds our body using five life-elements created by energy (earth, water, fire, air, and ether). If the conscious field weakens below certain level, we die. When we die, the conscious field does not die, but it continues to go on and assume the ownership of next body.

The entire process of Yoga is to strengthen this conscious field, so that it can go higher and higher levels. At the highest level, this conscious field expands exponentially. It is called as Samadhi. The **word “Bramha” means expanding consciousness.** There are many terms in Yoga that point to same expanding consciousness. We will use the term Universal Consciousness. Sage Patanjali described as the eighth and final step of Yoga. Many yogis all over the world have reported experience of Universal Consciousness. It gives us a confidence that Universal Consciousness is a real thing, and not a figment of imagination. **When you go from your current level of consciousness to next the level of consciousness, you experience a higher consciousness.** **The process of going towards higher consciousness ends in experiencing Universal Consciousness. That process is Yoga.**

Reader: Does this mean our current consciousness becomes the Universal Consciousness?

Author: That is correct. The first verse of **Isavasya Upanishad** says – That (universe) is conscious. I am conscious. The consciousness within me comes for that (universal) consciousness. Even though (the universal) consciousness is divided into many parts, the (universal) consciousness remains “as it is”. **Isavasya Upanishad gives us a critical equation – C divided by C is equal to C.** Here C means Consciousness. It tells us that consciousness is truly indivisible.

Reader: How does the experience of Universal Consciousness feel?

### How Does the Experience of Universal Consciousness Feel?

Author: Yogis tell us that the entire world has same consciousness as it is in within us. This is not just a theoretical concept. **When a Yogi enters into Samadhi, which is the state of universal consciousness, he experiences the entire world as conscious.** He witnesses it as undivided, changeless, and endless fine mist of consciences evenly spread everywhere. One great seer, sage Prajapati, from Veda has described this experience as below.

There is neither existence nor non-existence

There is neither air nor the sky beyond too

What covers the sky? Where is the air?

Where is the water, with its unfathomable depth?

There is no death nor is there deathlessness

There is no sign of day or night

There is only one, which is alive and aware

Other than that, there is nothing at all

There is darkness, wrapped up in darkness

Everything is superfine fluid like

Reader: It is hard to relate to this experience. I have experience of only the normal consciousness. Are there any levels or stages between the normal and the universal consciousness experience?

Author: Yoga defines seven levels of consciousness. At the end of seventh level, a yogi experiences universal consciousness. Please read the story and explanation of each level. **One of them will feel like description of your current questions, thoughts, or understanding about consciousness.** With that, you identify where you are on these level. These stories are referred in Ramayana as well.

## Levels of Consciousness

### Level 1 – Fish - Ignorant About Consciousness

King Satyavrat performed severe austerities for a long time. One day, while he was offering a water oblation in a river, he caught a tiny fish in his folded hands. Satyavrat was about to throw away the fish. The fish pleaded not to be thrown into the water, where larger fishes would devour it. Assuring the fish of protection, Satyavrat put it in a small jar and took it with him. However, the fish grew larger and asked for more space. Satyavrat moved it to a small pond, but the fish quickly outgrew it. As the fish outgrew water reservoirs, Satyavrat transferred it to the lake, then to larger reservoirs and subsequently to the ocean. The fish again told Satyavrat that it was afraid of the dangerous predators of the ocean. Bewildered by these words, Satyavrat asked the fish to reveal his identity, but soon deduced that this supernatural fish was none other than Lord Vishnu and surrendered to him.

Lord Matsya-Vishnu declared to Satyavrat that a great flood would come seven days from then, and would engulf the Earth. He ordered Satyavrat to assemble the seven great sages, and with their counsel, gather all kinds of seeds, herbs, and different beings to load them on a ship, which Lord Matsya-Vishnu would send on the fateful day. He instructed him to use serpent Vasuki as a rope to tie the boat to his fish-horn. Promising that he would sail the boat through the waters throughout the floods, Lord Matsya-Vishnu disappeared after this revelation. He reappeared as a horned fish on the day of the flood, when torrential rains drenched Earth. Satyavrat did as Lord Matsya-Vishnu had instructed and fastened the boat to the horned fish (Lord Matsya-Vishnu). Lord Matsya-Vishnu swam through the floodwaters. He talked to Satyavrat on various topics and revealed to him the knowledge of the Vedas, the Puranas, as well as the Supreme Truth. After the last wave of the flood ended, Lord Matsya-Vishnu slew demon Hayagreev. Lord Matsya-Vishnu rescued the Vedas from demon Hayagreev and handed them over to Lord Brahma.

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The fish level is the first level of the consciousness. Like a fish, which is always under water, we submerge ourselves in the ocean of ignorance. **We are ignorant about the consciousness, even though it is essential to sustaining our life.** We show a complete lack of interest in anything that gives even a hint of the consciousness.

Like a fish, which needs air to survive, we need our consciousness to sustain our life. Just as the fish takes in air but it is not aware of air, we are not aware of the consciousness.

Like a fish, which needs a small amount of air to survive; our consciousness at this level is minuscule. We consume all our available energy in survival matters. **Hence, at this level, consciousness barely sustains life. We will call this level as the normal level of the consciousness.**

A fish cannot sustain too much air, when it is out of water. If our consciousness level changes abruptly to a higher level, it may create serious problems for us.

The name Satyavrat means “one who is steadfast on walking on the path of truth.” The little fish that lands in the hands of Satyavrat represents his consciousness. The fish keeps growing and soon occupies the river and the ocean too. **It is a reference to expansiveness, which is a property of the consciousness.** Satyavrat is dedicated to truth. For this reason, and not by chance, the fish finds his way into his hands. His name is a suggestion to us to be truthful. The impending deluge is nothing but his eventual death that will take his life.

All the avatar stories depict the energy as a snake. In this story too, a snake called Vasuki represents the energy. Vasuki, the great snake, always accompanies Lord Vishnu, who represents the consciousness.

In the context of this book, we will use the words god or demon to mean an internal body-mind process that can be good, bad, or both. In addition, please note that the Psychological definition of the word ego has a different meaning and Sanskrit word Ahamkar does not translate directly to ego. For the purpose of this book, we will use ego as ahamkar and it will have the meaning of Sanskrit word.

### Level 2 - Turtle – Becoming Aware About Consciousness

In the battle between the gods and the demons, the gods, on one occasion, lost all their strength due to a curse by the short-tempered sage Durvasa. The gods approached Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu told them that the nectar of immortality would help them gain their strength back, and they could obtain it by churning the ocean. He asked them to use Mt. Meru as a churning stick and the great snake Vasuki as a rope. He also advised gods to seek the help of the demons to lift the mountain in exchange for a share of the nectar of immortality that would ensue from the churning.

Both, the gods and the demons, churned the ocean using the great snake Vasuki as the rope. As the churning was proceeding, the mountain began to sink in the ocean. To hold the mountain afloat, Lord Vishnu took the form of a tortoise (Lord Kurm-Vishnu).

Many great things came out of this churning of the ocean. First came out a poison known as Halahal. Lord Shiva took the poison, and by his yogic powers, held it in his neck. Goddess Laxmi came out next with the condition that Lord Vishnu marry her, to which the Lord Vishnu agreed. When the bowl of the nectar of immortality came out, the demons grabbed it. At this point, Lord Vishnu took the form of a beautiful maiden and seduced the demons into letting her distribute the nectar. As soon as the beautiful maiden served the nectar of immortality to the gods, she disappeared, thus deceiving the demons of the nectar of immortality and making them weak forever.

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In this story, the turtle is symbolic of the next level of the consciousness. Being an amphibian, it can survive in both water and land. At this level, we begin to acquire the knowledge and capacity of living at a higher level (as compared to the previous level) of the consciousness.

A turtle spends most of its life under water, rarely using its ability to breathe outside of it. Similarly, at this level of the consciousness, we spend most of our time in the ignorance about the consciousness. However, once in a while, suddenly and for no reason, we get a glimpse of a higher level of the consciousness. **Even though we spend most of our energy for survival, a small amount of it occasionally reaches the top of the head. The more energy is available, the more consciousness it creates, allowing us these glimpses of a higher consciousness.** Whatever be the nature of this experience of higher consciousness, it is a temporary condition or state. Whatever clarity of thoughts or feeling of joy we experience during that state goes away, and soon, we are back into our previous state of ignorance. **However, the impact of this glimpse is powerful enough to create a sustained memory of the state of higher consciousness.** Irrespective of how busy we are, we can remember those fleeting moments, and they dominate our choices for a long time.

**A large number of people are at this level, where they have definite knowledge that some higher level of the consciousness exists.** However, like a turtle, which prefers water to land, they prefer their existing state of ignorance to this new experience of the consciousness. **Whether to pursue a life of devoted to higher consciousness or not becomes an important choice here.** After careful deliberations, we may decide not to follow this new experience. The rationales may be many, like the fear of the unknown state of consciousness or doubt if such a world actually exists. Alternatively, we could be reluctant to make the hard choice of leaving all we have in life. Sometimes, safety and survival instincts are the primary concerns that dominate our logic at this level. **Even though the choice is available, we rarely take advantage of it. Therefore, our ability to seek the higher level of the consciousness remains unutilized.**

Even after making the no-go decision, flashes of the higher level continue to dominate our inner life. As a life progresses, the concerns that stopped us before, begin to fade slowly. As more and more space opens up in our life, the desire to understand more about these glimpses takes over.

**At this level, we have an unmistakable tussle, the push and pull between ignorance and the forces against it.** The story of the Turtle avatar depicts this as a fight between the demons and the gods churning the milky ocean with a staff and a rope. **The demons represent our thoughts and habits that pull us back toward ignorance. The gods represent our thoughts and efforts that take us out of ignorance to the next level.** The staff depicts our spine, and the snake coiled around the staff as a rope, is a reference to the energy that spirals up the spine. The turtle, supporting this churning, represents our consciousness that sustains our life. Since it is the first attempt in achieving higher levels of consciousness, the symbols are rather crude. As we go to the higher levels, the same depictions of spine, energy, god, etc. will become more and more refined.

**When a person stirs his subconscious mind in this way, not all goes well.** As the story tells us, along with good results, comes out a poison called Halahal. I do not know the exact translation of the word Halahal. To me, it looks like a composite word, with “hal” meaning “plough” and “a-hal” meaning “no-plough,” that is, a sort of “to do or nor to do” dilemma. The story tells us that Lord Shiv drank the poison, but held it in his throat without consuming it. **It advises us to expect dilemmas and severe reactions, but not to react to them and to be patient.**

The story further tells us that Goddess Laxmi appeared on the condition that Lord Vishnu would marry her, which he gladly accepted. For the first time, the energy appears in the story in the form of Goddess Laxmi, but she does not play a significant role here.

Good efforts win, making us ready to go to the next level. **This level is our bouncing board; even if we fall from the higher levels, we will land here.** Carefully make a note of the push-pulls and the dilemmas that we face in this state; we may come here more than once.

### Level 3 – Boar – Making Concentrated Efforts

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Hiranyaksh was born to the sage Kashyap and his wife Diti as a demon. Hiranyaksh practiced austerities, and Lord Brahma blessed him with a boon that made him indestructible by animal, which he listed or human. He tormented the inhabitants of the earth as well as the gods and engaged in war with the gods. During the war, Hiranyaksh took the earth and hid her in the primordial waters.

Hiranyaksh had not included the boar in the list of animals that would not be able to kill him. Therefore, Lord Vishnu decided to kill him by assuming the form of a boar. Taking the form of Lord Varah-Vishnu, he emerged as a small boar from the nostrils of Lord Brahma, but soon started to grow. His size increased to that of an elephant and then to that of an enormous mountain.

In the primordial waters, Lord Varah-Vishnu encountered the demon Hiranyaksh. The two fought fiercely with maces, and after a battle that lasted a thousand years, Lord Varah-Vishnu killed Hiranyaksh. Lord Varah-Vishnu rose from the ocean with earth on his tusks, and he placed her gently in her original position.

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The primary quality of the boar that is of interest here is its ability to focus its energy on a single target. Once it selects the target, it devotes 100% of energy, power, and attention to hit the target. **The boar has a horn, which is a simple and rudimentary tool at its disposal. Nevertheless, it puts so much power in using the horn that it succeeds in destroying its target.** All it knows is to run fast and hit hard as if running and hitting the target is the sole purpose of its life. The target is the only thing that ever interests it. Anything else does not even exist for it.

Similar to a boar running toward the target, when we are at this level, we spring into action. We are solely concerned with finding out more than what we know already about higher level of consciousness. **We focus as hard as we can, putting long hours into it as much as we can.** Nothing else interests us, and we are totally dedicated to the task.

**At this level, the rudimentary intelligence that we have is similar to the horn of a boar.** However, we deploy enormous energy using rudimentary intelligence and break into the next level of the consciousness. At this level, the constraints of the previous level still exist. The only difference is that we actively work on finding out details about the other levels of the consciousness.

As always in Yoga, the target here is not an external target, but an internal one. **Our inability does not let us experience anything but chaos, and that inability becomes our target.** In this stage, the only tools available to us are a lot of efforts and a very basic form of concentration of mind. With these, we intend to hit hard our ignorance that prevents us from reaching the next level.

At this level, we are not sure what might exist at the next level. However, the existence of the target, that is our ignorance, bothers us too much. Just because that target exists, we have to try to smash it. There is no other reason to go after it, except that it exists.

**We begin to see our state of affairs as bondage and make efforts to get rid of them.** Note that the target is not outside of us, so the efforts we make have no effect on anything outside of us. All that we are concerned with is ourselves.

We realize we spent a long time in the previous two levels and felt that we are stuck. Therefore, we decide to drop all the rationales that kept us from trying to reach higher. We are ready to experience whatever comes next and actively make efforts in that direction.

Note the shift in our preference; earlier we chose the cover of ignorance. Now we see that the same ignorance is keeping us away from reaching higher; so, now we try to remove it.

The logic and the habits we used previously to cover ourselves with ignorance become an impediment. Therefore, we make them our target. Since we are not entirely aware of the nature of our target, we hit it with all that we have. Whatever knowledge is available to us, we try to apply to this problem. We may try to meditate, or we may try selfless service and devotion. We may try to do our duty to the best of our capacity or we may venture into Yoga of various kinds. **We may not succeed in the first shot, but we keep trying.**

Whatever method we are pre-conditioned to use, given our family background or interest, we use it. Whatever is the available method, we work hard to break through the cover of ignorance. **We use all our energy against ignorance, without having any proof that we can remove it. It is an action-oriented level symbolized by the Boar level of the consciousness.**

According to the story, the demon Hiranyaksh took the earth to the bottom of the ocean. Lord Vishnu appeared as a boar, killed the demon, and rescued the earth. The name Hiranyaksh translates to “one whose eyes are focused on gold” and represents the ego/Ahamkar. The earth represents the Muladhar/Root Chakra as it has earth as its element and points toward the home of energy.

The battle between the demon and Lord Vishnu lasted a thousand years. It is a hint that our battle lasts for a long time. **At the third level of the consciousness, we put a great amount of efforts on removing the cover of ignorance, which helps us cross the threshold that takes us to the fourth level of the consciousness.**

### Level 4 - Man-Lion – First Experience of Higher Consciousness

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Lord Vishnu in his Varah avatar had killed the demon Hiranyaksh. Therefore, his brother, demon Hiranyakshipu, wanted to take revenge on Lord Vishnu. He desired to become a master of all the three worlds and began penance, which continued for years. Due to the intensity of the penance, Lord Brahma appeared before Hiranyakshipu. The latter asked Lord Brahma for immortality as a reward for his years of penance. Lord Brahma, however, declined, saying, "All living beings must face death. You can, however, choose your death wish." Hiranyakshipu asked for the fulfillment of the following conditions as his death wish, "Let not death come to me either by man or beast, demon or god, by day or night, weapon or soft power, indoors or outdoors, on earth or in the air.” Lord Brahma agreed, and Hiranyakshipu got his death wishes granted. Thus, he became practically immortal.

After securing his death wishes, Hiranyakshipu conquered the worlds and became a tyrant. He declared himself a god. The devotees of Lord Vishnu approached the Lord for help. Lord Vishnu asked them to be patient. Meanwhile, Hiranyakashapu's wife gave birth to Prahlad in the hermitage of sage Narad. Prahlad grew up and became an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu. Realizing that Prahlad always prayed to Lord Vishnu, Hiranyakshipu tried to school his son against the influence of Lord Vishnu. All his efforts, however, failed, and Prahlad remained as devoted as ever to Lord Vishnu.

Hiranyakshipu ordered his servants to kill Prahlad if he refused to accept the supremacy of his father. They tried to kill him by throwing him down the mountain, drowning, poisoning and burning him. They failed in all their attempts because Lord Vishnu was protecting Prahlad.

One day the king challenged his son in the open court, "Is my enemy, whom you worship, anywhere here?” Prahlad replied, "Lord Vishnu is omnipresent. There's not a single place where he's not found." Hiranyakshipu pointed his finger at an iron pillar and asked Prahlad, "Is your Vishnu in this pillar also?" Prahlad did not hesitate for a moment and replied “Yes.” Hiranyakshipu got up from his throne in fury and hit the pillar with his mace. To his surprise, the pillar cracked with a thundering sound and Lord Vishnu appeared there in the form of Lord Narasimh-Vishnu. One-half of his body was of a lion and the other half of a man. Hiranyakshipu hit Lord Narasimh-Vishnu with his mace, but Lord Narasimh-Vishnu brushed it aside swiftly. It was twilight. Lord Narasimh-Vishnu caught hold of the demon Hiranyakshipu, sat on the threshold of the courtroom, placed the demon’s body on his thighs and, piercing his nails into the body of the demon, broke open the demon’s stomach. The demon died on the spot.

Lord Narasimh-Vishnu was furious and roared. Prahlad pacified him, touching his feet and asking him to come back to his usual form. Lord Narasimh-Vishnu then became Lord Vishnu and made Prahlad the king.

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**At this level of the consciousness, we encounter the ego – the “I” sense within us – which the story depicts as the demon Hiranyakshipu.** He is the brother of Hiranyaksh, a demon from the previous story; this establishes continuity. The ego-sense, which is the root of ignorance, is not going to die in one battle at one level. We will see that at every successive level, ego’s grip on a person goes on weakening, level by level.

Like his brother, Hiranyaksh, Hiranyakshipu is also after gold; his name translates to “one who is rushing after gold.” He is a proud ruler, a fighter; he sees himself as the only controller and is ready to exercise his power. He is also in denial; he does not see the consciousness anywhere, so much so that he hates even a mention of the consciousness. For him, the power of the consciousness is overblown; most likely, it does not even exist. Even if it does, it is not be powerful enough to do any significant harm to him in any way.

Pause a moment here and try to identify yourself with this character. With a little change of words, you will see that his questions are also our questions: **Why should a person – successful and proud – care about the consciousness when its very existence is questionable?** He has searched all over his body and mind and not found any conclusive proof of the consciousness.

**The efforts we had put in the third level will prove beneficial at this stage. We see a small but steady stream of good thoughts, actions, and joy in our life.** In addition, there is a desire for higher consciousness. This desire, however small and steady, is the second character of the story, that is, Prahlad. Prahlad means “first joy.” Since the desire is small, the story represents it as a small boy. This “first joy” is unknown to the ego, and its desire to seek more consciousness makes the ego uncomfortable. Hence, the ego attempts to stop it or kill it while it is still small.

Unable to kill this desire, the ego finally confronts it by challenging it to prove the existence of the consciousness or be silent forever. **At this crucial junction, a lot depends on how a person acts. Hence, the story gives guidance, clearly stating what type of reactions we should avoid at all costs.**

Remember that there is a boon given to the demon Hiranyakshipu that no one can kill him given certain conditions: No god or demon can kill him. He cannot be killed either inside or outside the residence. No one can kill him in the air or on the ground; no one can kill him during the day or at night. A weapon or a soft power cannot kill him. A man or an animal cannot kill him.

We see that the ego has protected itself very well; it has taken care to guard against all extremes. **Ego is a master of division.** Dividing anything into two extremes is its favorite game and is its way of ensuring the opponent’s defeat. What the ego does not do well is to see the full picture as it is incapable of staying in the middle. **Staying in the middle and avoiding the extremes is the key to our success.** However, simple this sounds, recognizing the middle is not as easy as it appears. The air stands for flexibility and the ground for firmness. The daytime stands for activity and the night represent rest period. The house stands for our identity, created by thoughts and memory; being out of the residence stands for abandoning the entity that we were before. A weapon stands for the use of force and soft power stands for emotional tricks. Gods stands for good thoughts and demons stand for bad thoughts.

We can clearly see that this story is a reference to staying in the middle; however, we need to interpret this middle in the context of the previous avatar stories. In the tortoise story, we read about the churning of the ocean with the help of a snake and a mountain. This, we know, is an allusion to the spine and the energy traveling through the spine. Now, we go one level further and come across a technique to raise the energy higher through the spine.

The energy manifests itself in different forms; the most-common manifestation being our desires. The energy travels up from the base of the spine toward the head. Different chakras/centers consume it, and it creates a desire. If we take a standard light bulb as an example, then we can draw many parallels here. When electricity, a form of energy, circulates through the light bulb, it converts into light. Through desires, which act as voltage, we direct various centers to consume the energy. When the lower centers consume a major part of the energy, less energy is available for the higher centers. There is a kind of cyclic flow between the desires and the consumption of the energy through a particular center. **They keep feeding off each other, creating stronger desires to consume more and more energy than normal, turning it into an obsession.** Fearing this obsession, we impose certain moral standards and end up suppressing our desires. The moment we suppress a desire, we take out the voltage that attracts the energy to a particular center. **Both suppression and obsession are the two extremes; you can see that the ego enjoys them either way.** The ego loves to swing like a pendulum, and it is easy for it to move from one extreme to another without any difficulty.

**The middle point in the story is the middle point between these two extremes.** The suggestion is not to suppress a desire, but to let the energy rise to the center instead; not to consume the energy there, so that it can rise to the higher centers. Our bodies are designed in such a way that only two or three out of the seven chakras/centers are active for us. All of us have two or three kinds of strong desires; not everybody has every kind of a strong desire. It is a relief to realize that we are not fighting a battle against every kind of desire.

**If we could stay in the middle for these desires, the energy would rise from the base of the spine to the top of the head.** It is the nature of the energy to reach the top; all we need to do is not to block it by our choice of extremes. When a sufficient amount of the energy reaches the top of our head, it converts into the consciousness.

**The fourth level marks not just a linear progression, but also a drastic change in the level of the consciousness.** Its qualities are much more different from those of the third level; so, it needs sophisticated depiction. Therefore, we see that the avatar stories from this level onward have more characters, events, and sub-stories.

The first time such an event happens, the level of the consciousness changes and the change is noticeable. **When the consciousness level changes, it occupies our entire body-mind space. It is a scary moment as the breath may stop altogether.** **The mind may vanish as if it never existed; you may hear sounds or see lights.** Do not be scared when you see such strange events happening in your body; rest assured you would not get hurt in any way.

After some time, the flow of the energy to the top of the head reduces. The consciousness retreats; the mind and the ego are back. We get this assurance from the story where we read that everyone is scared when Lord Narasimh appears for the first time. However, upon Prahlad’s request, Lord Narasimh comes back to his normal form of Lord Vishnu.

It is only the first glimpse of the higher consciousness, and it is temporary by nature. We have to fight many battles before this higher consciousness becomes our normal level.

### Level 5 - Young Boy – Experience of Expanding Consciousness

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Demon Bali, the grandson of Prahlad from the previous avatar story, was a very valorous and mighty demon. By his penance and might, he conquered the whole world. Fearing that the demons would conquer all the three worlds, Indr, the king of gods, and other gods went to Lord Vishnu for help. Lord Vishnu was then born as a dwarf called Vaman. One day, as a young boy, after his auspicious thread ceremony, he went to Bali and asked for alms. Bali was delighted to offer him anything he asked, even though his priest had warned him that the young boy was Lord Vishnu himself.

Lord Vaman-Vishnu then requested for three paces of land. Bali gracefully agreed. Lord Vaman-Vishnu stepped from the heaven to the earth with the first step and from the earth to the netherworld with the second step. Unable to fulfill his promise, King Bali offered his head for the third step. Lord Vaman-Vishnu then placed his foot on King Bali’s head and killed him, helping the gods out.

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**After its first defeat, the ego/ahamkar changes its tactics. Earlier he was a bad demon, now he comes out as a good one.** The demon king Bali in this story is a good king. He is the grandson of Prahlad and the great-grandson of the demon Hiranyakshipu. It tells us that this story links to the previous one and is, in fact, a continuation of the same theme.

King Bali was a good person in all aspects of his life; then, why did Lord Vishnu kill him? **Is it not sufficient to be good? The answer is however good, he was still ego/ahamkar; however good, he was still a doer attached to his actions.** He claims total control over his body-mind; thus, he becomes a block in the path of higher consciousness.

Lord Vishnu’s former strategy of fighting with a demon does not work on this good-doer ego/ahamkar. As per the story, Lord Vishnu takes the form of a little boy, about eight to ten years old. He shows up at the doorsteps of King Bali after his auspicious thread ceremony and asks for just three steps of land to keep his feet on.

At this stage, what is it in our body that feels auspicious, but is minuscule? What does this little boy represent to us? It is important to note that King Bali did not feel threated by this young boy. Rather, King Bali welcomed him. Therefore, it means that our ego/ahamkar does not feel any level of threat from this new presence.

These are indicators of the first few moments of the experience of higher consciousness, which happens suddenly, on its accord. We suddenly become conscious; our mind becomes quiet, and for the first time, we become aware that the mind is gone. It is a brief moment, and it is very vulnerable to our initial response; a lot depends on how we react. It seems that we have the option here to "go back” or to “continue forward."

We can run back and return to the life of continuous thoughts and as a doer of actions. Alternatively, we can be brave and allow the consciousness to gain foothold the same way that king Bali allows the young boy three steps of ground. **The moment the consciousness gets a foothold, it starts expanding, engulfing us totally, and leaving no space for the ego.** The expansion of the consciousness is a common theme in almost all the avatar stories of Lord Vishnu.

The main take-away of this story is that, at this stage, there are few moments, when we experience a higher consciousness. However, small those moments may be, with the appropriate response, the consciousness expands rapidly and take us to the next level.

### Level 6 – Parashuram – A

The sudden expansion of the consciousness at the previous level is only a temporary event. Eventually, the higher consciousness retreats and we are back to our "old" reality. From here, we go to the next stage, progressing from a small boy in the last story to a full-fledged warrior in the new one. It means that the higher consciousness becomes very powerful at this stage and wages a war against the ego/ahamkar. The ego/ahamkar seems to be on the defensive side, marking a break from its aggressiveness in the past.

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Lord Parashuram is an avatar of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu took this avatar to kill the Kshatriya (warriors) kings of the earth, who had become arrogant and were harming people and saints in the forest.

Lord Parashuram was born to sage Jamadagni and his wife Renuka. Sage Jamadagni had a favorite cow named Kamadhenu, which had special powers. King Kartaviry was one of the many kings that had lost their ways and become tyrants. King Kartaviry came to know about the cow, and he stole the cow from sage Jamadagni's home. Enraged, Jamadagni went and killed the king and brought his cow back. Angered by the killing of his father, the son of the king killed sage Jamadagni. On learning this, Lord Parashuram avenged the death of his father by killing all the kshatriya men, not only once but a thousand times.

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The claim that Lord Parashuram killed the warriors not just once, but a thousand times presents logical difficulties. Fortunately, being a Puran story, it can be interpreted in the context of spirituality. What do the kshatriyas represent in this story? What is it within us that comes back even after we have removed it several times? The answer is that it is the ego/ahamkar associated with desires; it can come back even after being destroyed a thousand times. The story depicts this seemingly endless fight with the ego/ahamkar that happens at this level.

The consciousness at this stage is not refined, but it has the upper hand. The ego/ahamkar begins to be defeated, but it still has one more game left.

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According to one legend, Lord Parashuram wanted to meet Lord Shiv one day, but Lord Ganesh, the god of knowledge, blocked his way. Angered by this insult, Lord Parashuram threw his axe, given to him by Lord Shiv, at Lord Ganesh. Aware that the axe belonged to Lord Shiv and so could not go in vain, Lord Ganesh allowed the axe to cut off one of his tusks.

Upon learning about the turn of events, Goddess Parvati (wife of Lord Shiv and mother of Lord Ganesh), became enraged and decided to teach Lord Parashuram a lesson. She announced that she would sever both arms of Lord Parashuram and kill him and went on to assume the form of Shakti (Goddess Durga) – the ultimate source of power, which no other divine entity could resist or match.

Fortunately, Lord Shiv arrived at the scene and pacified Goddess Parvati. He convinced and requested her not to harm Lord Parashuram and asked her to forgive him, just as a mother forgives her child. Lord Parashuram too asked for her forgiveness. Goddess Parvati relented when Lord Ganesh made the same request. Lord Parashuram then gave his divine axe to Lord Ganesh and blessed him.

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This story gives us more details about Lord Parashuram than the previous one. Here, Lord Parashuram represents a higher, but crude level of the consciousness, whereas Lord Shiv represents the highest level.

We have seen that Lord Ganesh – the god of knowledge – controls the access to Goddess Parvati, and thus, indirectly to Lord Shiv. Since, at Parashuram’s level, the war with the kshatriyas (the ego/ahamkar) is still going on, this level cannot be the highest level. Knowing that the impurities of the ego/ahamkar are still present, Lord Ganesh blocked Parashuram’s access to Lord Shiv.

Instead of realizing his limitations, Lord Parashuram got angry and entered into a fight with Lord Ganesh. He tried to force his entry into Lord Shiv’s abode and tried to meet him Shiv by force. His forced entry into Goddess Parvati’s house provoked her, and she took a wrathful form. Fortunately, Lord Shiv arrived at the scene, pacified Goddess Parvati and avoided further catastrophe. We needed Goddess Parvati to keep him alive, as he is our only connection between this level and the Shri Ram level.

In Ramayan, there is an event where Lord Parashuram meets and challenges Shri Ram to pick up Lord Vishnu’s bow Shri Ram, which he picks up easily. Interestingly, the story tells us that Lord Parashuram’s work as an avatar of Lord Vishnu ends after this event. We can understand this puzzle easily, if we see it from the point of view of levels of the consciousness. When a person makes heroic and arduous efforts for a long time at Parashuram’s level, the stage becomes set for his transition to the next level, making the character representing those efforts irrelevant.

### How Does Spirituality Define “Living a Good Life”?

Author: Something we think “I have a limited time on earth. I spent majority of this time in basic needs and getting to a certain place in life. Even then, things that I do not want happen. Things that I want do not happen. Before I know, old age and death start to sneak up upon me. Everything I collected around me will be left here and I will be no more! I did not even begin to live life, and death will snatch it away from me.”

Above paragraph indicates our attachments to things and life in general. These lines show fear of losing possessions and death. They mean an unavoidable misery.

### Where Do I Begin To Learn About Spirituality?

Author: We must begin at the same point where we are. There is no need to know anything about spirituality. **Whatever we truly need for this journey already exists with us. There are no pre-conditions.** We can begin at any moment – as long as it is a present moment!

Reader: I may start the study but I may not be able finish the study. Will I lose the benefits because I stopped without completing the study?

Author: All of us have doubts about our capability to undertake and complete the study. Therefore, questions of these types are natural and common questions. Sometimes a person is young or old, clever or not, physically fit or not etc. Sometimes a person may think that it is better for him to study something else and complete it, instead of starting study of spirituality and leaving it half way.

Great gurus like Shri Krishna and Lord Buddha have answered these questions. **According to them, even an honest wish to study spirituality takes you a long way. The efforts that you put in always give you their benefits.** In addition, these results will be returned to you, when you need them the most. We can trust their words and assurances. We can use our doubts to test their words.

Reader: It seems it is worthwhile to spend some time to understand Spirituality. **What is Spirituality?**

### What is Spirituality?

Author: Spirituality is a **study of self**. The Sanskrit term is “Adhyatma”. “Adhya” means study and “atma” means self.

Reader: Can you answer who, what, how, and when about this study?

Author: **You are studying yourself, by observing yourself, in the present moment.**

Reader: What is the purpose of this study? What are benefits of this study?

Author: The purpose is twofold: **1) It teaches us to live a life of action, self-expression, and emotions. At the same time, our outlook towards life becomes balanced, friendly, and compassionate in spite of ups and downs in the life.** **2) We understand our true nature.** There are benefits like good health, long life, and good lifestyle but they are side effects.

Reader: What will happen if I decide not to study myself?

Author: It is a perfectly valid position. You are free to do so. There are no disadvantages.

Reader: In that case, why should I study myself?

Author: **The desires of living a good life and to know “who am I?” are built-in within you.**

Reader: Everyone has a desire to live a good life. I think a person knows himself by his family, his work, birthplace, age, education, views, achievements etc. Is this information not sufficient to know “who am I?”

Author: As we go through life, all of the above information changes**.** Sometime we initiate a change. For example, we get married or change jobs etc. Sometimes, nature forces the change upon us. For example, we get old.After having enough of these changes during our life, we want to find something within us that does not change**. We want to know “who am I, that is seeing all these changes?”**

Reader: I want to know “who am I?” **Can you explain how to know “who am I”?**

### How To Know “Who Am I?”

Author: We can go about finding “who am I?” by many ways. We can broadly classify them into two types. **The first type is to gain the knowledge of our true nature directly.** It leads to the experience of our true nature. **The second type is to do some kind of process or action or method etc. that will give an experience of our true nature. It will indirectly lead us to same knowledge of our true self.**

Reader: Since the knowledge is what I want, I will take the first option. Do I have to read a lot?

Author: **All you need to read is one page! Read 18 verses of Isavasya Upanishad.** It takes only a few minutes to read it. When you understand it, you will get answer to your question ‘who am I?’

Reader: I read all the 18 verses. I did not understand.

Author: Don’t be disheartened. Very few people in world understand it in the first attempt. There are many other documents like this. They may be big in size, but they are equally difficult to understand.

Reader: I think direct knowledge is not right choice for me. Tell me about the second type.

Author: There are many options available for you in this type. **The common options are Right Action (Karma), Devotion (Bhakti), Duty, Service, Faith, Non-Violence, Surrender, various types of Meditations, Yoga (Patanjali) and others. The less common options are the path though Warfare, Wealth, Dance, Love (Tantra), Vocalization (Mantra), Riddles (Zen), and countless others.**

Reader: How do all these options give rise to the experience and same knowledge of “who am I”?

Author: Here is a simple analogy. Assume that you are on an island. It takes few hours to reach to ocean from center of the island. Assume that you are searching for any kind of water. If you search for few hours in any direction, you will definitely find water. **Just as all paths on island will take you to water, all of above options will lead you to same knowledge of our true nature.**

Reader: **How do I choose one option or path over other?**

### How Do I Choose One Path Over Other?

Author: We all are unique individuals. Our minds work in different ways. In addition, our mind may work in different ways at different times. Even then, there is a path for every possible kind of mind.

**To choose a path, we should know what kind of efforts and experiences come naturally to us.** Many factors affect the choice of path. Some examples are our familiarity with certain paths, training received during our childhood, our previous choices and attachment to it, and our previous experiences and their interpretations regarding a path etc. **The only way to find out what works for us is to try out two or three paths.**

Reader: In other words, it is up to me to decide. No one can tell me what is right for me or force me to follow a specific path?

Author: It is correct. Everyone is free. You can decide for yourself. When you are trying different paths, you need to be careful about one thing. **Each path uses key words, with a specific meaning attached to them. Different paths use same key word with different meaning.** For example, in path of Devotion, words like God and Faith are very important. Path of Yoga has these key words too. However, Yoga does not attach any importance to them. **The word Yoga is also a key word.** It is used in other paths like Bhakti Yoga etc. We will use word Yoga to refer to an eight-step path described by sage Patanjali.

Reader: I thought words like God and faith have same meaning on all paths. Can you elaborate this point?

Author: **Let me tell you a story from Ramayana to help you understand this point. Saint Tulasidas explained four views of God based on four types of people.**

If you do not know Ramayana, please watch the free YouTube movie ‘Ramayana - The Legend of Prince Rama’. The URL is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5B1wKHT_hY>

### Story: Four Views of God Based on Four Types of People

Everyone who knows Ramayana has a question – ‘Was Shri Ram a great human? Or was he a God?’ To answer this question, Saint Tulsidas compared Ramayana with a beautiful lake. This lake has four banks. On each bank of the lake, there is an assembly hall. In all assembly halls, people are currently listening to Ramayana. However, each assembly hall reads the story with a completely different meaning.

**The first assembly hall is for people, who seek direct knowledge of “who am I”.** It leads them directly to the experience of our true nature. We will use the term Universal Consciousness to refer to our true nature. We will learn about it later in book. Lord Shiva is the speaker and Goddess Parvati is the listener. Lord Shiva is explaining how Shri Ram is our true nature or Universal Consciousness.

**The second assembly hall is for people, who are dedicated to Right Action (Karma).** They focus on good actions and cultivating good habits. They adore great people, ideals, and values. They live a very honest life. **They do not see any necessity of God, goodness, or Universal Consciousness to do right actions.** Nonetheless, they gain experience and knowledge of Universal Consciousness, indirectly by performing proper action. Sage Yadnavalkya is the speaker in this hall and Sage Bharadvaj is listener, along with few other people. They see Shri Ram as ideal human being, who is dedicated to right action and adheres to great moral values.

**The third assembly hall is for people, who take path of Devotion (Bhakti).** They have a faith that there is a higher power in form of God. They believe that world is created by God. The logic they use is “if there is a pot, there must be a potter”. If science tells them that universe was created by Big Bang, then they ask who created Big Bang? **They devote themselves completely to God.** They believe that the God keeps the track of their good actions. They also believe that God returns the results of good action to them, when they need the most. God as an ideal human being is not sufficient to them. **They need a personal relationship with God.** They see God in human form (Saguna). They will gain experience and knowledge of Universal Consciousness, indirectly by their faith. In this hall, a great devotee of God, Sage Kakabhushubdi is the speaker and Garuda, the Eagle, and many others are the listeners. They see Shri Ram as a God, whom they can establish a personal connection by being his devotee.

**The forth assembly hall is for people, who surrender to God.** Their belief about God is same as the people in third hall. They seek help from God. They want God to rescue them from their troubles. **They do not think that they can change their situation without God’s help.** They know that sometimes they are sinners. They seek forgiveness from God for their sins. They believe that god forgives them and absolves them from their sins. God as a strict accountant of good and bad deeds does not work for them. They will gain experience and knowledge of Universal Consciousness indirectly through surrender. Saint Tulsidas is the speaker in this assembly hall and common people are the listeners. They see Shri Ram as someone who can help them in their need, give them strength to go on, and he can absolve them from their sins.

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Author: In this story, we see that different types of people have different concept of God or Universal Consciousness. **Your personality helps you determine the path you chose and that path decides the concepts of God, Faith, and many other key words for you.**

Reader: It is an interesting story. It helps me to think what type of person I am and what type of practice will work for me. **Is there any assembly hall for people, who practice Yoga?**

Author: **Yoga is becoming a significant spiritual practice all over the world. Therefore, similar to other four assembly halls in story above, we need a build a new assembly hall for people, who practice Yoga!**

Reader: What are the beliefs and practices of the people in this new assembly hall?

Author: **The people in this hall love life itself and want to enjoy it as much as possible.** They focus on good health, flexible body, and a mind that can handle stress. They emphasize on cleanliness of body, mind, and their surroundings. They do not cheat, steal, or harm others. They are friendly, approachable, and treat everyone equally. They appreciate beauty in nature, people, and other things. They are not likely to over eat, over sleep, or get addicted to anything. Only few amongst them know practice Yoga as a spiritual path. **The** **majority of people are aware that there is a spiritual side of Yoga, but they do not really care about it.** Some of them event want to stay away from any such spiritual talk. Even those people get all the benefits that come from spiritual side of Yoga!

**They do not believe in God as a creator of universe.** They insist on a scientific view that Big Bang created universe. They do not believe in God in human form (Saguna). They believe that there is some higher power, but they cannot define what it is. Nonetheless, **Yoga will lead them to experience and knowledge of their true self, the Universal Consciousness.**

Sage Patanjali is the speaker in this hall and people like all of us, who are practicing Yoga, are the listeners. In this hall, we are exploring Ramayana as Yoga scripture that helps us understand difficult concepts of Yoga. For example, we are learning about Energy of Yoga from the character of Sita in Ramayana.

Reader: **How does Yoga and Ramayana related to each other?**

### How Does Yoga and Ramayana Relate to Each Other?

Author: **Ramayana is a story. Its main character is Shri Ram. He represents the Universal Consciousness. Yoga is a path that leads us to the experience of Universal Consciousness.** Thus, they are very closely related.

Reader: I read Ramayana translates to ‘Advance of Shri Ram’. Is that correct translation?

Author: Sanskrit word ‘Ayana’ means advance or movement. The word Ramayana generally translates to ‘Advance of Shri Ram’. However, in Yoga, we see as Shri Ram represents Universal Consciousness. Universal means “One that is everywhere”. When there is no place without Him, how can He move from place to place? Thus, for us, Ramayana means ‘Our Advance towards Universal Consciousness’.

Reader: How does learning about Ramayana help me in Yoga?  
Author: **When we consider Yoga as a path that advances us towards Universal Consciousness, we can think of Ramayana as a Travel Guide.** Ramayana explains difficult concepts of Yoga in easy to understand story. Its characters represent different concepts of Yoga**.** When we replace characters with Yoga concepts, we get a very different view of ourselves through Ramayana. It provides very valuable signs, symptoms, recommended actions, warnings, etc. on a path of Yoga. Thus, it leads us safely towards the Universal Consciousness.

**We can walk on any path without a travel guide. A path of Yoga is a spiritual path. It has some peaks, valleys, and few slippery slopes.** **Therefore, investing time in a travel guide is a smart choice.**

Reader Responds: I have so many basic questions. **What is a spiritual side of Yoga?**

### What is Spiritual side of Yoga?

Author: Yoga is one of the many ways we can study ourselves. So let us start with studying ourselves. **Keep your hand on your chest or on the stomach.** Observe the various movements and thoughts for a minute.

Reader: I could feel my heart beating, and my stomach rising and falling with my breath. I had thought like “what am I doing” and then my thoughts drifted away.

Author: That is fantastic observation! **Just by doing this experiment, you have covered the most important topic of Yoga.** Now all that remains is to understand “what you saw and felt”. Let us take a closer look.

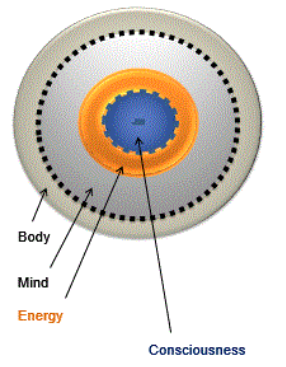
The breath, the beating of heart, movement of stomach etc. tells us that there are many “active” parts of our body. Our body is made of bones, blood etc., which are the “matter”. **Both matter and its activities belong to energy.** Physics tell us that matter is made of energy and energy is always active.

As you said, you started to have thoughts like “what am I doing”. It tells us that there is an awareness within you that is observing what you are doing. In addition, there is an intelligence within you, which starts to think. **This awareness, intelligence, and thoughts belong to consciousness.**

In general, we say body, mind, and spirit. Yoga splits the term ‘spirit’ into two terms as energy and consciousness. **By doing Yoga, we see them as body-mind-energy-consciousness. Learning about them is called as the Spiritual side of Yoga.**

Reader: **Can you explain why you joined body, mind, energy, and consciousness as one term?**

### Why Yoga Joins the Terms Body-Mind-Energy-Consciousness?



Author: Please look at the picture. We know that we have a body and a mind. **If there is no body, there will be no mind.** Thus, the body becomes the outer ring. The mind becomes inner ring.

When we are angry, we breathe faster and our body shakes. When we are in shock, we stop moving for few seconds. **Thus, we see that our state of mind affects our body**. **By doing Yoga poses, we can change the state of mind and body as well.** Therefore, the line between them is a dotted one. We denote it by hyphenating them as body-mind

**Both body and mind depend on energy.** When we have high energy, we are active. When we have low energy, we become inactive. **By doing Yoga poses, we can increase the level of energy too.** Thus, energy becomes inner ring to body-mind.

When a person dies, his consciousness leaves the body. In that case, body, mind, and energy cannot function at all. Thus, the consciousness becomes the innermost circle. **In Yoga, we learn that** t**he energy unites with consciousness.** Hence, the line between the energy and the consciousness is also dotted.

When we put four of them together, we get body-mind-energy-consciousness. It is the spiritual side of Yoga.

Reader: This is interesting. **What exactly is Yoga?**

### What Is Yoga?

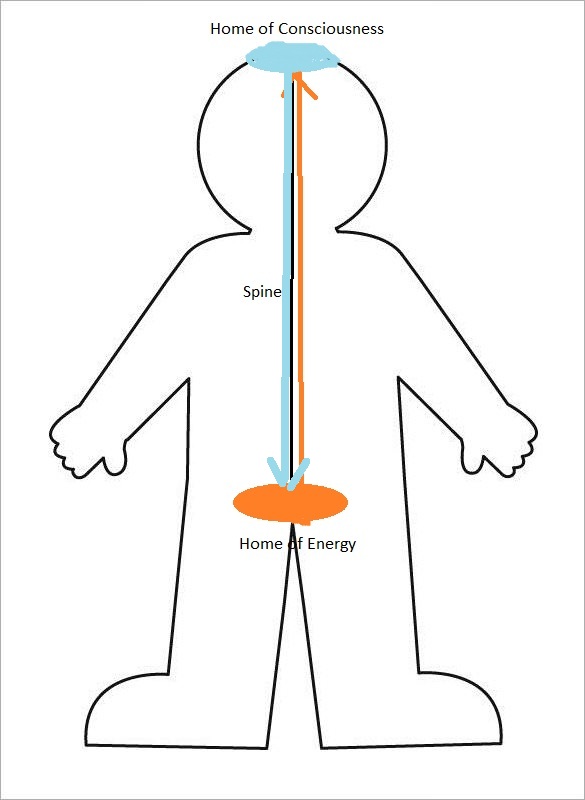
Author: Sanskrit word ‘Yog’ means union. In Yoga, it means union of energy and consciousness.

**By doing physical poses and focusing on breathing, we increase level of energy in body. Those poses mainly work on spine, which allows the energy to flow to the top of the head. The increased energy then unites with consciousness to create relatively higher consciousness than before. Eventually, we experience the Universal Consciousness, the highest level of consciousness.** The experience of Universal Consciousness answers the question “who am I?”This process is called Yoga.

Reader: Where did the energy and consciousness came from in first place in our body?

Author: Energy and consciousness are the building blocks of the universe and our body. In our body, the place of the consciousness is the crown of the head. The energy’s home is at the base of the spine. The spinal cord connects these two points.

**As per Yoga, energy radiates all over body from the base of spine.** This higher consciousness spreads all over the body and it also come down through spine.  **These movements of energy and consciousness are always happening in our body. In other words, without us doing anything at all, our body is already doing Yoga! All we need to do is to understand it and build upon it.**



As per physics, we can neither create energy nor destroy it. The same is also true in Yoga. We have unlimited energy at the base of our spine. We need to make efforts to release it. **Yoga is a way to release this stored energy from the base of spine, then move it across the spine to the head, where it can unites itself to the consciousness.**

Reader: So, in essence, the energy movement is the key to Yoga.

Author: Correct. All the poses and breath work in Yoga are designed to initiate and help energy flow with body.

Reader: **What are the benefits of energy flow of Yoga to me?**

### What Are the Benefits of Energy Flow of Yoga to Me?

Author: The benefits of Yoga are the same as the benefits of spirituality. They are 1) living a good life and 2) knowledge of true self. The way Yoga provides them is as follows:

1. Higher consciousness has medicine like effect on the body and mind. It calms down the mind to make it undisturbed by emotions or pains. Once the mental pain is reduced, it becomes relatively easy to deal with anything that makes us lose balance of mind. Higher consciousness also makes the physical pain go away, and replace bodily pain with neutral sensations. There is a long list of physical and mental benefits of Yoga on internet. **These benefits are only side effects of higher energy and higher consciousness achieved through Yoga.**
2. From the base of the spine to the top of the head, there are seven chakras / centers. **When we do Yoga, and release the higher energy, it passes through these chakras and activates them.** For example, there is a chakra in out throat. When energy activates the Throat Center, a person becomes an excellent orator or singer.
3. **It starts a cyclical process within body.** Higher energy produces an even higher consciousness than before. Higher consciousness, in turn, fuels a greater amount of the energy.

Reader: This is interesting. If they are cyclic processes that depend upon each other, then how higher can these processes go?

Author: If they continue to go higher, then we get to witness Universal Consciousness. At that moment, we get knowledge of our true self. It is a highest state of a human being. It is called as ‘Samadhi’. The word ‘Sama’ in Sanskrit means balance. **The highest state in Yoga is of ultimate balance!**

Reader: Why universal consciousness loses its universal state?

### Why Universal Consciousness Loses its Universal State?

Author: These concepts are rather hard to explain. Let me tell you a story from Ramayana to make it easy to understand. **Please focus on main theme of story - a wish of Shri Ram to separate from Sita and Sita giving birth to their children.**

### Story: Shri Ram and Sita Separate

**The event of separation of Shri Ram and Sita is at the very end of the Ramayana.** For those who do not know Ramayana, this is a quick synopsis: Ravan, the demon king, had abducted Sita. Ravan took her to his remote and heavily fortified island called Lanka. Shri Ram with his brother Laxman, with help of Hanuman and others, invaded Lanka. They had a long and fierce battle with Ravan, his son Indrajit, and brother Kumbhakarn, in which they almost killed. In the end, Shri Ram defeated them and rescued his beloved wife. They returned to Ayodhya, their capital city. Shri Ram was crowned as a king and ruled happily. Now, we will see the event that caused of his separation from Sita.

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**When Rama saw that Sita is blessed with pregnancy, He became very happy.** Lovingly, he asked her “You have now become pregnant with a child. What do you want? Sita replied, “My desire is to spend one night with those sages, who live in jungle, near bank of river Ganga.” Shri Ram said, “So be it”.

Next day, Shri Ram attended the court. As a highly attentive king to his citizens, Shri Ram enquired, “What are people talking about in the city and countryside?” One courtier replied, “**People are gossiping about queen Sita.** They are saying that after killing Ravan, Shri Ram rescued Sita. But, Sita was forcefully taken by Ravan into his lap. Then Ravan took Sita to Lanka. He kept Sita in his own pleasure garden. Why should not Shri Ram be disgusted with Sita, since Sita was under the power of a demon? Now we will have to tolerate such things from our wives, for whatever the king does, the people imitate”.

Upon hearing this, Shri Ram felt very sad. He called Laxman. Laxman saw that the Shri Ram’s eyes are full of tears. His lotus face is devoid of luster. Shri Ram said, “O Laxman, at that time, to prove her fidelity, Sita entered a blazing fire in your presence. Agni himself verified that she is without a sin. **My mind also knew that the glorious Sita was pure.** Therefore, I accepted Sita and returned to Ayodhya. But now, there is this nasty gossip.”

**With a heavy heart, Shri Ram took the decision. He ordered Laxman, “O Laxman, this is my wish. You should take Sita to the border of the kingdom and leave her there.** Crossing to the other side of the river Ganga, you will find the great sage Valmiki’s hermitage. Leave Sita there in a desolate place and quickly return. Previously, Sita told me that she wanted to spend time in the jungle. Therefore, her desire will now be fulfilled.” Laxman was shocked to hear these words from his brother. Laxman knew how much Shri Ram and Sita love and care for each other. But, he had no choice but to obey his king’s wish.

Next day, Laxman asked chariot-driver, Sumantra to make chariot ready. Laxman entered the palace. Coming before Sita, he said, “You made a request to Shri Ram and He wishes me to take you to the bank of river Ganga”.

They drove towards the edge of the kingdom. When half the day had passed, Lakshmana saw the current of the river Ganga. He began crying loudly. Seeing Lakshmana overwhelmed with intense grief, Sita asked, “Why are you crying? We reached at the banks of river Ganga. My long-cherished desire is now fulfilled.”

Laxman looked down and, with a voice choked up with tears, said, “**Shri Ram wishes to separate from you.** By the order of the king and with a heavy heart, you are to be left by me on the edge of the hermitage.”

Upon hearing his harsh words, Sita experienced extreme despair. She spoke the following sorrowful words to Laxman: “O Laxman, do as you were instructed. Tell Shri Ram that I understand that He needs to do what He must. He knows that I am pure. I have highest devotion to Him. I would use my rest of the life to achieve His goals. Furthermore, I am not in anxiety about myself.”

After Laxman left, Sita was alone in jungle. Sage Valmiki’s students saw her and reported to sage Valmiki about her. Sage Valmiki went there and invited her to stay in his hermitage**.**

After leaving Sita in jungle, Laxman became overwhelmed with terrible anguish. Sumantra, the chariot-driver, faithfully said the following words: “O Laxman, you should not be anxious on account of Sita. **Shri Ram’s fate was told to your father at the time of his birth.** **We were told that Shri Ram would be a glorious ruler of Ayodhya. Nevertheless, He will separate from Sita.** **Shri Ram and Sita will give birth to two sons**.” Then, Sumantra told Laxman the details as how their separation was decided long time ago. Hearing that these sad turn of events are preordained, Laxman felt little better and he went to Ayodhya.

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Reader: This seems to be sad ending of the Ramayana. Are the two events, Sita being pregnant and Shri Ram sending her away in jungle, somehow related to each other?

Author: Yes, these two events are certainly co-related. Sita separates from Shri Ram as per his wish and then she gave birth to his kids. **Next, we will see Shri Ram as Universal Consciousness and Sita as Energy. We will see the real reason behind their separation.**

Within the universal consciousness, there is an energy. Its nature is of light, sound, and movement. As an effect of this energy, the universal consciousness is self-luminous and has a self-created sound. **In Yoga, we chat AUM. It refers to this self-created sound within universal consciousness.**

With the energy within itself, the infinite universal consciousness is in equilibrium. There is peace and disturbance, at the same time.

In this infinite universal consciousness, for reasons we do not know of, there arises a spirit of enquiry concerning itself. **Being consciousness, it is aware of itself, so the question “Who am I?” arises in it, without any words or associated concepts.**

Reader: Wait. Didn’t we start with question “who I am?”

Author: Yes, it is the same question. As we saw, our normal consciousness and universal consciousness are the same. Therefore, it is logical that they have same question. **To know “who am I?” universal consciousness becomes normal consciousness. In same way, when you get an experience of universal consciousness, you will know answer of “who am I?”**

Reader: This sounds like a circle to me. Am I missing anything?

Author: No, you are correct. All we need to do is to connect the dots and then we see the full circle. **The first half of circle is the universal consciousness becoming the normal consciousness. The second half of the circle is Yoga, which is a path to experience the universal consciousness.**

Reader: **How the universal consciousness becomes our normal consciousness?**

Author: Let me introduce you to few more characters in Ramayana. These characters clarify key concepts, which are part of the answer of your above question.

### Story: Introducing Ravan and His Family

Author: Let us get a quick introduction of the characters of Ravan and his family**.** Ravan is a demon king**.** He is married to Mandodari. Their son is Indrajit. Ravan has two brothers – Kumbhakarn and Vibhushan. **They represent a specific yoga related process within us.** It is essential to see them as they are.Avoid thinking about them as demons and focus on their character traits. We find these traits within ourselves as well. **Once you understand them in their true sense, you will cover 50% of complex concepts in Yoga.**

Ravan as Ego/ahamkar - **Ravan represents our ego/ahamkar.** Our ego is insecure. It tries to grab power. It likes a life of indulgence. We see these characteristics in Ravan. Ravan is a king of demons. He is powerful, active, and indulgent in sensual pleasures. His capital city, Lanka, is very rich, with golden palaces and marvelous gardens. Even though Ravan has defeated all enemies and he lives on an island, Lanka is strictly guarded. It indicates his insecurity. “Lam” from “Lanka” (in English spelling, letter m is missing) is the letter of the Root Center/Muladhar Chakra. **The Root Center is associated with a sense of insecurity, which in turn is closely related to the ego.**

Ravan is an undisputed king of the demons. Yet, he feels alienated from the others. He does not trust anyone. He does not pay heed to any of his counselors. He is a hard worker, a great fighter, and knowledgeable in various arts. Our ego surely has all these characteristics.

One of Ravan’s names is "Dashanan," which means "one with ten faces." **His multiple faces represent the various masks that our ego wears.** Probably, our ego has more than ten faces. His other name is "Dashgreev". It means "one with ten tongues." A tongue represents lust and false speech. Ravan and our ego have 10 of those. **Thus, when we see Ravan as an ego, we feel that we are very familiar with him.**

Ravan as Rajas Guna – **In addition to personification of the ego/Ahamkar, Ravan is also an example of one more critical concept – the Rajas Guna.** Ravan is very active in nature. He is a very busy demon. He concurred almost all other kings. He rules a very large kingdom. He is an expert in 64 different arts. He is a highly accomplished warrior. He has many other qualities that tell us that he is highly active in nature. Ramayana uses his character to demonstrate the nature of rajas guna. **The rajas guna is present in everyone. It is responsible for all kind of activities. This force of nature pushes us into action, whether physical or mental.** By itself, it does not recognize any limits or does not check itself on its own. A rajas dominated person is always involved in one action after another, possibly in multiple actions at the same time.

Kumbhakarn as Tamas Guna – **Ravan’s brother is Kumbhakarn. He represents Tamas Guna.** He eats for six months and sleeps for the remaining six months. It requires an army of demons just to wake him up! Tamas Guna is characterized by inertia**. A Tamas Guna dominated person has a tendency of overeating, oversleeping, and overindulgence in sensual pleasures. This person finds himself resisting the call of action.** He can find many reasons for not doing any particular action or justify his inaction. Tamas Guna is present in everyone. When it starts to dominate, it brings lot of troubles.

**One of the very interesting point of Tamas guna is that it has a momentum.** It means that even if an overweight (as an example of Tamas dominated person) starts exercising, his weight does not start to drop right away. His weight will go up before it starts to go down. In Ramayana, we see that even after Kumbhakarn’s hands are cut, they keep moving. In addition, when his head is cut off, his body crawls long distance**. It tells us that even if a person manages to overcome Tamas guna, it will continue to exert its power for some time.**

Vibhishan as Sattva Guna - Vibhishan” means "not horrible." Like Kumbhakarn, Vibhishan advises Ravan to return mother Sita to Shri Ram. When Ravan did not pay heed to his advice, Vibhishan deserts Ravan’s camp and joins Shri Ram’s side. He becomes a main advisor to Shri Ram. He helps Laxman to kill his nephew – mighty and invisible Indrajit. After the defeat of Ravan, Shri Ram honors Vibhishan as a close friend. Shri Ram crowns Vibhishan as king of Lanka and returns to Ayodhya.

**Through Vibhishan, Ramayana explains sattva guna.** **It is attracted towards spirituality. It tries to search for god or higher power or purpose.** Rajas and Tamas guna do not know any balance. They do not check themselves. Sattva guna seeks to balance all of them together.

Three Guna and their relationships to Consciousness - Both Ravan and Kumbhakarn, symbolic of rajas and tamas guna, battle Shri Ram. However strong and brave they are, Shri Ram ultimately defeats them in battle. Shri Ram defeats Ravan (rajas), but does not become king of Lanka. Shri Ram neutralizes Kumbhakarn (tamas), but does not become lazy. He befriends Vibhishan (sattva guna), uses it, and rewards it too. However, in the end, Shri Ram steps away from Vibhishan (sattva guna) too.

We saw that spirituality, which includes yoga, is an activity dominated by sattva guna. However, ‘good’ it is, it is different from consciousness. **In other words, the consciousness is not the same as these three qualities of nature. It is “above and beyond” them and will always remain that way.** The three guna and their relation to the consciousness are the most significant findings of yoga. Ramayana helps us understand it.

Ravan’s wife, Mandodari as rationalizing intellect/buddhi - Along with Sita, Mandodari is one of the five important females in Puranic stories. She has small role to play in Ramayana. We know that Ravan represents the ego/ahamkar. Mandodari is Ravan’s wife. She represents the rationalizing intellect/buddhi.

When Ravan abducted Sita and brought her to Lanka, Mandodari did not approve of his action. Mandodari comes out as surprisingly rational about these events and advises her husband not to take the wrong course of action. Giving advice and keeping composure in a distressing situation is an indication of the rationalizing intellect/buddhi.

Indrajit, son of Ravan and Mandodari as component of mind – According to yoga, the ego/ahamkar and the rationalizing intellect together create the mind. We will see it in next chapter. By substitution of words, we get: **Ravan (the ego) and Mandodari (the rationalizing intellect) together gave birth to (create) Indrajit (the mind).** Indrajit as the mind itself fits perfectly with the character of Indrajit. **Mind can control the sense organs,** which is why his name means “one who won Indr (who represents sense organs).”

**A mind can create bad desires and they bind advanced yogi.** In Ramayana, Indrajit uses network of arrows, which turn into poisonous snake against Shri Ram and bind Shri Ram. **Mind can create illusions and trick a yogi.** In Ramayana, Indrajit created illusionary image of Sita and killed her in front of Shri Ram.

In Ramayana, Laxman, Shri Ram’s brother, kills Indrajit. Laxman represents devoted mind. Hence, we Indrajit represent an “opposite of devoted mind” component of mind. **Ramayana teaches us a lot about the mind from the character of Indrajit.**

**With this basic introduction of Ravan’s family, we can answer the question – how universal consciousness becomes normal consciousness?**

### How Universal Consciousness Becomes Our Normal Consciousness?

Author: To know itself, the universal consciousness creates two parts within itself. The first part, the Consciousness, retains the awareness property of the universal consciousness. The second part, the Energy, inherits the energy of the universal consciousness.

**After separation, the consciousness becomes a living soul, the principal form of life.** It abandons its universal or cosmic nature and limits itself to being a living soul.

**The Energy creates a space within the universal consciousness. Thereafter, within the space, the energy creates air, fire, water, and finally earth, in that sequence. The Energy also creates three guna – Rajas, Tamas, and Sattva.** The Energy and Consciousness create a life form using the five elements and three guna. Each life form has Energy and Consciousness parts in it. They work side by side in all life forms. For example, the Consciousness wishes to see, the Energy then creates eyes in body.

**The living soul brings forth the faculty of egotism - the concept of “limited self” or “I.”** With the ego as its primary identity, the living soul gives up its identity and becomes the ego itself.

**The living soul creates the faculty of rationalizing intellect/buddhi. The ego and the rationalizing intellect together create the mind.** Using the mind, the living soul thinks, “I am atomic in nature and state”; so, it becomes atomic in nature.

**The mind creates thoughts. Ego hides behind the mind.** Staying hidden, it drives the mind. The ego creates the thoughts in the mind of “me and I”. Ego assumes the ownership of the entire human form. It declares “this is my body” and “this is my mind.” The ego thinks that it is separate from the rest of the world. In this way, the universal consciousness becomes our normal consciousness, which is dominated by mind and ego. **Being separate and conscious, the universal consciousness gets to “know” itself. Thus, it becomes our normal consciousness.**

### What are levels of consciousness?

Author: We know the dead state as it has no consciousness. We know there is a coma state where a person is not aware of himself. However, the cells in his body continue to perform their functions. If you do not sleep well for a day or two, you will be aware that you do feel dull. Eat and sleep well, and you will be aware that you are feeling normal. These are the typical levels of the awareness in our body, and we all know them.

Yoga defines 10 levels of consciousness.

Reader: This is Interesting. Tell us more about the levels of consciousness.

### Where do I begin?

Author:

What knowledge do I need before beginning? Are there any pre-conditions for starting? What difficulties I may face? What is the correct age to get into it?

Reader: I want to know “who am I”. How does Yoga help me in this quest?

### Is Yoga a modern innovation or an ancient practice?

Author: Saint Tulsidas told this story almost 500 year ago in India. It reflected the spiritual practices or paths of Indian culture at that time.

As time passes by, all cultures and their spiritual practices, come under different influences and evolve to suit needs of its people. Something similar happened to Indian culture and Yoga. Partly due to western interest in Yoga, Indian culture re-invented the Yoga in a new form. Some experts argue that modern Yoga is a recent, less than 100 years old, innovation. It is wrong. Indians have been practicing Yoga for centuries. It was not a mainstream practice, as very few people taught and practiced it. Nonetheless, it did exist. Seeing Ramayana as a way to explain Yoga proves that Yoga has been one of the spiritual practices of Indians for a long time. Geeta also have many verses related to Yoga.

Of all the four assembly halls this story describes, I do not fit perfectly in any one of them. I do not Author: There are countless assembly halls like these.

Reader: Which type of Yoga you are referring to?