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# To Consciousness via Yoga: Q and A with Stories

AUM

## Laws of 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 a stretching exercise. Why should I spend my time on these topics?

Author: Everyone cares about his or her life. The consciousness is the difference between a living person in this moment and his dead body in the next moment.

This book collects information about consciousness from various sources, pieces them together, and presents a Unified Theory of Consciousness. It advances knowledge of the reader about consciousness. **It is widely known that Yoga and Meditations are immensely helpful in dealing with mind related sicknesses and day-to-day stress.** Consciousness is the source of power of Yoga and Meditations. In this book, we will see the laws and levels of consciousness with many stories that explain consciousness.

Science is in early stages of understanding consciousness. **However, humanity has spent millions of man-lives on studying the consciousness.** All over the world, cultures stored this collective knowledge in the philosophy and religion. It is called Spirituality. We will study spirituality to understand the science of consciousness. 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, which teach us about consciousness. Yoga is one of them. Yoga uses various physical poses/asana, but Yoga is not a physical pose. **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.

**Reader: What is consciousness?**

### What Is Consciousness?

**Many eminent men were asked the same question – “what is Consciousness? They did not answer in words, but they indicated the answer with a pure silence.** When pressed for a verbal answer, one of such a prominent men answered, “Not that, not that, not that”. These may be the best answers. However, they do not help us understand the science of consciousness. Hence, we must struggle in our normal ways and try to understand it.

In science, we have pure science like Physics and applied science like Engineering. **Similarly, we will separate Consciousness Science and its applications in Yoga as an applied science of consciousness.** Any discussion about Consciousness Science becomes abstract and very difficult to read. To keep the book interesting, we will see various stories that have consciousness as a main character!

**The information presented here about consciousness is ancient.** However, the way of expression, language, and interpretations are new. I hope that rephrasing makes this complex topic a little easy to understand. However, it is up to an individual to discover consciousness for himself.

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

**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 conscious of it.** In that moment, his consciousness is witnessing that object. It is possible for consciousness to be aware, with no object in it.

**Let us see how the consciousness works in our body. Here are the laws of consciousness.**

1. **When consciousness forgets its awareness, it becomes Mind.**
   * Our mind thinks various types of thoughts/feelings/emotions, etc. They are outward movement of mind towards objects of the world. Our mind can also turn inwards, which is away from world objects and towards ourselves. **When mind turns inwards towards itself, it becomes consciousness.** Essentially, our mind and consciousness are the same.
   * **When mind becomes clear of objects, it becomes the consciousness.** When consciousness regains its complete awareness, there is no mind. When consciousness entertains objects, gets involved in them, and then forgets its awareness (impure consciousness), then it becomes the mind. Let us look at a story that conveys same meaning as above.

**Story:** Buddha and Ananda, his disciple, were passing through a forest. They had just crossed a small stream. Buddha is an old man, and he says to Ananda, "I am feeling very thirsty, you go back to that stream and bring me some water in my bowl." Ananda took the bowl and went back.

Meanwhile, a few bullock carts had passed through the stream. It had disturbed its water completely. It had become muddy. The water was not drinkable. Therefore, Ananda went back to Buddha and told what happened. Buddha said, "Go there and wait." Ananda did not want to go, but Buddha insisted.

Ananda went back and was surprised to see that the water was as crystal-clear! All that was foreign - the dirt, the dead leaves - had all gone. The water had come to its purity. He filled the begging bowl of Buddha.

While coming back, Ananda thought, "Why was Buddha so adamant that I have to come back here to bring water? I could have brought it from another stream. There must be some reason."

As he came back towards Buddha, the reason became obvious. The leaves and the dirt, which are not natural to the stream, are bound to leave the stream as the stream is always flowing. The same is true about our thoughts, our emotions, our sentiments, etc. If we just wait patiently, they all will disappear with no effort on our side. Our purity will assert itself on its own accord.

* Above story, told by Osho beautifully explains us that when mind becomes calm, it becomes consciousness.
* Mindrelated sicknesses like stress and depression are common health problems. Just as body gets fever, mind gets these sicknesses. The person going through depression is in a lot of pain, but he does not know it. **Like a run-away-train, his mind keeps thinking a same thought, without a break or sleep.** This is a destructive thought. He has convinced himself that this thought is important, and he is thinking it for a good reason. Unfortunately, he is losing touch with reality and hurting himself. He needs a doctor. To become “normal”, he has to fight a battle against the tendency of his mind to think destructive thought. To be normal means “to become aware when mind is stuck in a destructive thought for a long time, having an ability to pull mind out of that thought, and pay attention to his body or surroundings or task in hand”. **Understanding nature of mind and consciousness will help such a person to win this battle.** I have experienced depression. To be normal, I worked on understanding consciousness. I am writing this book to share my experience and to help people in a similar situation.
* Like many people, I get disturbed by thoughts, control or avoid them, or fight against the mind to stop thoughts. It does not work, and it created more misery. **Knowing that ‘consciousness becomes mind’ helps me to be aware of thoughts and allow those thoughts to come and go, without being disturbed by them.**
  + Samkhya tells us that when we are having desires/thoughts/feeling etc., we are experiencing effect of three components mixed with each other. They are 1) Rationalizing intellect/Buddhi 2) Ego/Ahamkara and 3) Mind. The mind is created from the first two components. It is a sixth sense and as a controller of five senses and organs. This mind generates desires/thoughts/feeling, etc. We experience only the ultimate effect of the desires/thoughts/feeling, etc.
  + Jesus Christ explained it in very easy-to-understand words. He said, **“Unless you change and become like a little child, you will never enter kingdom of heaven”.** (Matthew 18:3-5). We can easily understand that to become childlike means not having ego/Ahamkara, Rationalizing intellect, Mind with desires, etc. We can interpret kingdom of heaven to a state of very high level of consciousness. With this, we get – **when you change and drop mind (ego/Ahamkara, Rationalizing intellect, and mind with desires/thoughts/feeling etc.), you enter a state of very high level of consciousness.**
  + Gita chapter 10, verse 22 says **“I am the mind amongst senses; I am the consciousness within living beings”.** The context of this verse is different, but we can interpret this verse: I am the mind that controls other five senses of the body of a person and I am the consciousness within the body of a person. **We can simplify this verse as Mind involved with senses = Consciousness.**
* Ramayana, using characters, shows Ravan as Ego/Ahamkara, his wife Mandodari as a Rationalizing intellect, their son, Indrajit as a mind. Word “Indrajit” means “One who won Indra” and the word “Indra” comes from word “Indriya”, which means “sense organs”. Thus, “Indrajit” means “a mind that controls sense organs via desires/thoughts/feeling etc.” **In Ramayana, we get a view of mind that is very easy to understand.** We get a two-way split of mind as bad mind as a character of Indrajit and devoted mind as a character of Laxman. “Lakshya” means “focused” and “man” means “mind”. We see that devoted mind defeats bad mind in a very challenging battle!
* In Patanjali Yogsutra, we come across term **“YogaH chitta vrutti nirodhaH”**. The word “vrutti” means “latent tendencies that create desires/thought/feelings etc.” These latent tendencies are stored in the “chitta”. The word “chitta” has a root word “chit”, which means consciousness. Word “atta” means, “taken away or off”. Whenever this storehouse of latent tendencies (chitta) is agitated, the desires/thought/feelings etc. come out. **Therefore, the job of Yoga is to take out not only the expression of the tendency, but to remove the entire latent tendency forever.** Once all the latent tendencies of stored in chitta are cleared out by doing Yoga, all that remains is consciousness!

1. **The mind (as consciousness) exists all over the body.** 
   * We can easily verify this statement. When there is a pain in a body part, we notice it. Thus, the consciousness exists all over the body and therefore mind too exists all over the body.A powerful emotion generated in mind (say, anger) changes the entire body.
   * Western concept about the mind is that mind exists in the brain. **At the physical level, a part of mind surely resides in the brain.** We have a physical brain, which has various centers that handle a specific type of information. Our senses collect the information from our surrounding. Our nervous system sends that information to the brain. Brain responds to this information by sending out electrical signals. Those signals regulate the body, control the movement, or influence thoughts/feelings/emotions, etc.
   * **The processes of collection of the environmental information via sense organs do not reside in the physical brain.** They reside all over the body. The information that senses collect is not in an electrical signal format. A sense understands only a sensation. Hence, there must be a super-sense that converts the sensations into electrical signals. We know that mind is a sixth sense and as a controller of five senses. **This function of mind resides with individual sense.** Similarly, the response from brain is an electrical signal. Our organs of body translate this signal from brain into an action. An organ also understands only a sensation**. In an organ, the electrical signal from brain converts into a sensation, and then into action. This is a function of mind too.** Just as mind is a sixth sense, it is also an organ, and controller of other organs. **Thus, other part of mind, the one that does not reside in brain, resides all over the body.** Therefore, in Eastern thought, there is no separation between body and mind.
2. **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.**
3. **Consciousness needs sensations.** 
   * **To fulfill its need of sensations, consciousness uses sense organs and mind (as a sense organ) to generate sensations in the body.**
   * 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. A mind can image an image and then create a similar sensation. Thus, mind is an internal reason of sensations. The reason for a sensation could be internal or external; either way, it does not matter to consciousness.
4. **Consciousness is a field, like a magnetic field, with no mass associated with it.** 
   * Consciousness holds our body and mind. It allows them to function.All the mass in the body is made from five life-elements. In Sanskrit, they are called “Panch Maha Bhute”, which means “Five Great Life Elements”. For example, blood is made from water life-element and bones are made from earth life-element. These life 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.**
5. **Consciousness is an indivisible.**
   * Consciousness has no mass, and it is a field. Hence, it cannot be divided. Even if a part of the body is removed, the field remains intact and still can generate sensation. Medical science calls it ‘Phantom Limb’. The sensation reported in cases of phantom limbs matches to the sensations of space life element. Even if body part with other life-element is removed, the space life-element remains intact. It allows a conscious field to function in the space of removed body part and thus generate sensations.
   * Gita verse 2.23 says, “Weapons cannot cut it, nor can fire burn it; water cannot wet it, nor can wind dry it.” We can easily understand this verse when we see it as a field, similar to a magnetic field.
6. **A sensation has the two components – consciousness and body part.** 
   * 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. For any sensation to work, there has to be 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 movement. Using the sensation types, we can identify five different planes in the body.
7. **The consciousness within our body comprises trillions of superfine conscious particles.**
   * The word consciousness does not give the 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.**
   * We think there is just one or a singular consciousness within the body. However, the reality is much more nuanced. Medical science has proved that even if the heart stops beating, brain functions for some more time. US laws recognize two forms of death – a death when the heart stops and when the brain stops. There are instances where pregnant women, after being declared dead, have delivered a baby. Above facts indicate that there is not just one consciousness in the body.
8. **The trillions of superfine particles of consciousness are not stationary within the 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, it releases them from that part, and they go back to the top of head.
   * Top of the head performs four functions 1) attract and collect conscious particles from entire body 2) generate conscious particles 3) distribute the conscious particles all over the body and 4) some conscious particles escape away from the top of head. The first three processes maintain the flow of consciousness within the body. We will see the details later in the book.
9. **When the conscious particles movement increases, we feel alive.**
   * The dullness or freshness we feel directly results from 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 increase the flow of conscious particles to top of head, and then we feel fresh, better than before, and conscious.
10. **The rate at which the conscious particles flow depends upon the purity of consciousness.** 
    * Definition of impure consciousness: When consciousness is impure, meaning it has become mind (with ago/Ahamkara, Rationalizing Intellect, Mind as a sixth sense) and it creates thoughts/desires/feelings etc. and gets involved in them.
    * Definition of pure consciousness: When consciousness is aware of itself, it is a pure consciousness.
    * **When consciousness is impure, 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.
    * **Sleep is a function of consciousness**. Mind impedes the conscious flow. Hence, consciousness puts us to sleep. In sleep, there is mind and it restores conscious flow. It allows conscious particles to reach all the body parts and rejuvenate them with conscious particles, which has medicine like effect.
    * Sometimes we experience that a body part becomes numb. When there is a sensation, it releases conscious particles from that body part and they go to the top of head. If the consciousness 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 consciousness is pure, then conscious particles can flow easily, and then a person can hold a sensation in that body part for a longer time.
11. **As we become more conscious about a sensation, it feels like a neutral sensation. Therefore, the intensity of sensation is inversely proportional to consciousness.**

**Experiment:** This experiment is not for anyone who is feeling pain because of injury or health problem.

Search for any minor pain in your body. A simple way to find minor pain is to pay attention to our hands. Our hands go unconsciously to scratch or rub or do minor adjustments. Once you find such a minor pain, force your mind to keep feeling the pain. Do not focus on any other body part and do not let your mind drift in thoughts.

**If you keep feeling the pain, you see that the pain shoots up. Earlier it felt like a minor irritant, now it will feel like a major and unbearable pain. After a while, the pain will almost vanish, and you will feel neutral sensations.** The physical reason of irritation will still be there, but it will not hurt or trouble like before.

When we focused our attention on pain, we made our mind work against its natural tendencies of aversion of pain. **When we focused our attention, we felt actual magnitude of the pain.** **Hence, the pain felt like it went up.**

Later, pain dropped, and you felt neutral sensation. **When we focus our attention on a particular part of the body, we bring our consciousness to that part. The arrival of the consciousness in the body part makes us feel neutral sensations, and you felt that that the pain went away.**

**Loss of pleasurable sensations also happens because of the consciousness.** To enjoy the taste of our favorite food, we have to bring our awareness to our tongue. When we do that, the consciousness replaces the pleasant taste sensations by a neutral sensation. A neutral sensation in the tongue does not mean that the taste buds stop working. They keep doing their job, but it does not generate the earlier good response because the consciousness neutralizes their sensations.

* + We all want to feel pleasant sensations and avoid painful sensations. However, while we engage in choosing the sensations, aversions and cravings set in. With it, mind becomes active. We become less aware.
  + When we are less conscious about sensations, the sensations appear gross, intense, and stationary. As we become conscious about the sensations, they become smaller, neutral, and shifting from one point to the other point in the body. **Thus, intensity of sensation we feel is inversely proportional to consciousness.** This does not mean that the physical reason of sensation, like the injury or health problem, goes away.
  + There were several men with much higher consciousness than we normally can experience. Let us take examples of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and Lord Mahaveer who suffered a major injury because someone hammered nails through his ears while he was meditating. We cannot even imagine the amount of physical pain they were inflicted upon. Their physical bodies got hurt. Any such an injury surely created excruciating pain. Yet, they did not complain about it. They even had compassion to forgive the wrong doers! Despite the physical injury, these men may have felt neutral sensations because of their higher consciousness, and they could maintain their higher consciousness by observing the pain (not reacting to the pain).

1. **Our mind thinks thoughts to counterbalance the pain that naturally exists in our body.**
   * Have you noticed that when you are in pain, you are more aware of your body? It hurts when there is physical pain somewhere in our body. However, as we pay attention to pain, the pain shoots up and becomes unbearable. **Then, our mind diverts our attention from the injured part of the body to some other thoughts.** Most of the time, they are pleasurable thoughts. This pleasing thought consumes our attention, and we forget the original pain for a short while. **These pleasing thoughts create pleasurable sensations throughout our body, counterbalancing the unpleasant sensations resulting from injury.**
   * If we follow the logic of counterbalancing sensations a little further, we find the reason for which mind becomes active. **The mind thinks thoughts to counterbalance the pain that naturally exists in our body.** The mind becomes active because it helps to ease the natural pains in the body.
   * The corollary of this law holds true. In an absolute no-pain state of the body, there is no mind at all. For example, in deep sleep, while having a good laugh, during intense moments of creativity, even if you try to find the mind or the thoughts, you cannot find so.
2. **Mind stores and re-plays most effective thoughts or feelings to create sensations.**
   * When thoughts/emotions/feelings etc. are present in mind, they create sensations all over the body. **Mind stores the most effective thoughts/emotions/feelings etc. as deep-rooted mind patterns (Chitta-Vrutti).** Whenever mind needs a bodily sensation, it re-plays the same thoughts, emotions, or feelings, and creates bodily sensations for itself. For this reason, we cannot stop having thoughts and feelings in our mind.
   * When the deep-rooted mind patterns (Chitta-Vrutti) runs in mind, it creates the same sensation in the body, when the pattern was created and stored. When it is in a dormant form, it remains stored (Sankhara) in the mind as its storehouse.
3. **Mind runs the deep-rooted mind patterns in autopilot mode, which gives us our unique subjective experience.** 
   * Because of some environmental stimuli (or randomly) it picks up a deep-rooted mind pattern, runs it to create thoughts, emotions, or feelings. They remind us of some other thoughts, emotions, or feelings, which are also stored as a pattern. Mind then runs that pattern. It keeps going on until we consciously put an end to it.
   * This run-away train of thoughts gives rise to a subjective experience. For example, when you and I look at the same rose flower, we experience it differently. You may look at its beauty, and then it may remind you of some other beautiful experience, whereas I may see the same flower but focus on a thorn, and it may remind me a painful experience. Therefore, even though we had the same stimuli, (watching rose flower) we experience it differently from each other.
4. **Consciousness is impartial to both pain and pleasure in the body-mind.**
   * Sensations can be pleasurable, painful, or neutral**. Consciousness does not care about pleasure or pain of body or mind.** As long as there is a sensation, even if the sensation is painful, purpose of consciousness is served. Gita 13:23 says, “Consciousness is a master and an enjoyer within a body.” The word “enjoyer” means that even if a person is in pain, his consciousness gets the sensation out of that pain.
5. **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.
6. **Reaction to sensation is the critical feedback loop.**
   * As long as the reaction exits, it gives feedback to mind that this particular thought or feeling is working to generate sensations. **Without the reaction, mind 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. This is the only way to keep consciousness pure.
   * Each deep-rooted mind pattern creates a sensation in the body. Therefore, Yoga and Buddhist meditation technique called as Vipasana, say that when you able to observe the sensation without reacting to it, the pattern become ineffective (Chitta-Vrutti NirodhaH mentioned in Yoga Sutra of sage Patanjali).
7. **Amount of breath we take in is directly proportional to purity of consciousness.** 
   * For example, when we are angry, we breathe harder. It is a visible indicator, which tells us that our consciousness has become impure and mind has become very active. Being aware of breath calms mind and allows consciousness to become pure. When consciousness becomes pure, amount of breath we take in becomes small.
8. **Energy converts into consciousness, which increase level of consciousness in body.**
   * The food and breath convert 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 consciousness to become pure. This process becomes a cyclic process. It allows us to go to a higher level of consciousness. It has more awareness and pure consciousness as compared to earlier level.
9. **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 speed up the bodily processes that heal a body part.
   * The entire medical sciences of Ayurveda and old Chinese medicine are based on consciousness. In Yoga, the moon is regarded as the king of all medicines and its place in the body is in our head. It is a reference to the consciousness and Yoga mentions its healing powers.
   * In Ramayana, Shri Ram represents higher consciousness. The name given to Shri Ram at his birth was “Ramachandra.” “Chandra” translates to the “moon”. This is an indirect reference to the healing powers of the consciousness.
10. **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 around it. This is expansion property of consciousness.

**The limitations of above definition are:**

1. 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 a very long description of an elephant, but only an elephant truly understands itself! (It is called as Subjective Experience). 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 doubts or forget the earlier experience.
2. 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 like jumping on to a running merry-go-round. **We describe consciousness using other concepts. Those concepts, 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 a few exercises, experiments, trial-and-error, etc. and experience the consciousness. Once you experience it, you can easily understand various aspects of consciousness.
3. 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: How do we define the term consciousness?

Author: The working definition of consciousness is as follows.

**The consciousness is our original nature, which is made of trillions of dynamic conscious particles that act as a field to hold our physical body together, and then forgets its original nature to become mind.**

Lord Mahaveer defined the consciousness as “original nature” (Swa-Bhava). Lord Krishna and Buddha used word Dharma (Dhamma) as “one that holds together”. Sanskrit root word “Dhar” means, “to hold”. Samkhya tells us that the consciousness forgets its original nature and becomes mind.

Reader: What is a scientific view on consciousness?

### What Is the Scientific View on Consciousness?

**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 at the back of the head. Its function is to coordinate voluntary muscle movements and to maintain posture, balance, and equilibrium. This type of correlations is 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 notice food items or have thoughts about food.

There are millions of activities happen in and around our body. Each organ of body is connected to brain, so brain has a 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 as 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. It arises in our brain. 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.** It refers to finding out why and how humans differ from the robots. **Science does not have an answer to this question.**

Reader: Why is it hard to detect scientifically consciousness?

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

**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 are conscious.

**How can I prove to you I am conscious?** The only way I can prove to you 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 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 focused on one thing, I ignored 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. **If we design an efficient robot that mimics you, then science cannot differentiate between you and robot.**

In this context of science, what is the consciousness? There is no answer. **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: What are the differences between Science and Yoga related to consciousness?

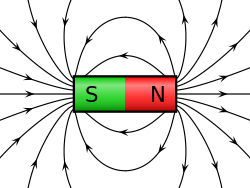
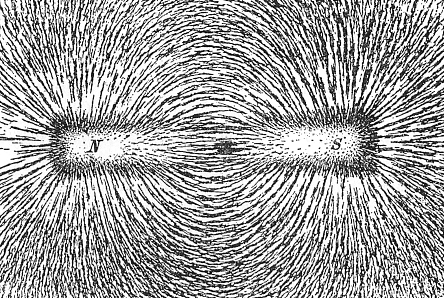
### What Are the Differences Between Science and Yoga Related to Consciousness?

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. Science thinks consciousness arises in the brain. For Yoga, consciousness acts like a magnetic field. This field is all over the body.**
3. Some scientists believe that consciousness arises in our brain. By this logic, they conclude that consciousness is a quality of the body. However, dead body exists without consciousness in it. Hence, consciousness is not a quality of the body.
4. **Science sees body as made of bones, blood, tissues, etc. made of 128 elements from the periodic table.** Yoga sees us 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, as a field, holds all of it together.
5. **Medical Science, with help of medicines, can fix the problems of mind. Yoga is essentially doing the same job without medicine. Medical science is valuable in sickness and maintaining good health**. When you are good health, there is not much for a good doctor to do with you. Yoga can help you after you are well.
6. Science has a 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. That is one of the main assertions of Yoga.
7. **Science takes the 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.**
8. Reader: After reading this, it feels like science and Yoga are using the word consciousness with a different meaning. **Can you explain consciousness as a field?**

### Can You Explain Consciousness as a Field?

We know that every magnet has a magnetic field surrounding it. We can see the magnet by our eyes, but the 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 an 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 like the electromagnetic field. Instead of north and south poles of electromagnetic field, the conscious field has just one pole (monopole magnet) – one at the top of the head. In Yoga, we call it Sahastrar. Just as the 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. Because of the 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 four distinct processes are happening at the top of head (Sahastrar). They are collection, generation, distribution, and decay of conscious particles. Let us take a close look at each of these processes.

1. Collection: Job of the collection process or collector is to “collect” conscious particles from all over the body, which are released because of being aware of a sensation within the body. There are two collectors within the body. Secondary collector situated at the back of the forehead (Command Center/ Anahata chakra) activate first. When it has collected enough conscious particles, the primary collector, situated at the back of the brain, becomes active, and it pulls all the conscious particles from the secondary collector.
2. Conversion: The top of the head takes 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. 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.
3. Distribution: This generated consciousness spreads all over the body. There it associates with the body part and wait for that body part to receive a sensation. Once there is a sensation, the conscious particles are released and attracted towards the top of head. This creates a flow of consciousness within the body. This action of consciousness being pulled or attracted towards Sahastrar is documented in Yoga. It leads to the experience of Samadhi.
4. Decay: Some conscious particles escape from our conscious field into Universal Consciousness.

**The conscious field, made of trillions of conscious particles, with a continuously flow that is sustained by first three processes is “life”.** This densely populated field exists in thinly populated conscious field, called as Universal Consciousness. Note that the density word is misleading as there is no space and there are no dimensions in Universal Consciousness. We are using density word in a relative comparison sense. The conscious particle in the body is taken from Universal Consciousness around it. This conscious particle is the same in body, where it is densely packed with other particles and it is the same in the Universal consciousness, where it is thinly populated. The fourth process, decay, is death itself.

Yoga says that the conscious field comes first, and body is secondary. 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 a 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.

**When aware in the current moment, then the conscious flow is pure, the person is under “Sattva” guna of nature. When the consciousness is impure and gets preoccupied with a desire of mind, then conscious flow becomes dense and slow, the person is under “Tamas” guna of nature. When the mind is active and focused on an object of mind, then the conscious flow is flow is active, the person is under “Rajas” guna of nature.**

Normally, the flow of consciousness is very difficult to feel. When we perform breathing exercise called as Pranayama, we increase the flow and begin to notice this flow. The entire process of Yoga is to strengthen this conscious field, so it can go at 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. At a certain level of consciousness, the separateness that we feel from rest of the world vanishes and we experience one consciousness, which we call as Universal Consciousness. In Sanskrit, this experience is described as “Aham Bramhasmi”, which means, “I am the ever-expanding consciousness”.

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 indivisible.

Reader: Can you describe Universal Consciousness in words?

### Can You Describe Universal Consciousness in Words?

It is not possible describe Universal Consciousness in positive words. However, we can describe it negative words. Saint Ramdas indicated Universal Consciousness in following negative words.

It does not have a shape. It does not have a base (nothing is holding it). It cannot be imagined. It does not have water. It does not have any appearance. It does not have any body parts that will divide it. It does not have to do any activity. It does not have any bad or dark spots. It does not have any limiting condition. It does not have any parallel or similarity with anyone or anything. It does not hang down from anything. It expects nothing. It does not have any fear. It does not have space in it. It does not have three guna – Rajas, Tamas, and Sattva. It does not have any connection with anything. It does not have any impurity. It does not have any motion. It does not have any words. It does not have any blame. It does not have any mind or mental tendencies. It does not have any desire. It does not have any coating on it. It does not have any duty to perform. It does not have any name. It does not have a birth. It does not have any direct access to it (not directly visible, approachable, or perceivable). It does not abide by any mathematical rules. It does not have any action to perform. It does not have any decay. It does not have any form. It does not have any goal or target. It does not have any end. It does not have any dimension. It does not set down. Any logic cannot explain it. There is no second, meaning, it is just one. It is not visible. It is not perishable. It is not destructible. It cannot be cut in pieces. It cannot be burned. It cannot be mixed into anything. It stands beyond anything and everything. **You experience it as yourself, meaning, you are the universal consciousness. You will experience it when you follow the path guided by your guru.**

Reader: How does the experience of Universal Consciousness feel?

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

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 Samadhi, which is the state of universal consciousness, he experiences the entire world as conscious.** He witnesses it as undivided, changeless, and an endless fine mist of consciousness 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: A person has to go through seven levels of consciousness before he can experience Universal Consciousness. At the end of the seventh level, a person can witness the Universal Consciousness. However, before we discuss the levels of consciousness, we need to understand Spirituality and Yoga. It will help us understand consciousness in concrete and tangible terms.

## Levels of Consciousness

### What Are Levels of Consciousness Between the Normal and the Universal 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 know you feel dull. Eat and sleep well, and you will know you are feeling normal. These are the typical levels of the awareness in our body, and we all know them.

**From this point onwards, Yoga defines seven levels of consciousness** **between the normal and the universal consciousness**. At the end of the seventh level, a yogi experiences universal consciousness. Please read the story and explanation of each level. **One of them will feel like a description of your current questions, thoughts, or understanding about consciousness.** **With that, you identify your current level, what to expect in that level and the next level.** These stories are referred in Ramayana.

### 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, and 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 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 Ahamkara does not translate directly to ego. For this book, we will use ego as ahamkara and it will have the meaning of Sanskrit word.

### Level 2 - Turtle – Aware About Consciousness

In the battle between the gods and the demons, the gods, on one occasion, lost all their strength because of 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 get 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.

**Numerous 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 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, fade slowly. As more and more space open 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 excellent 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 “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 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 and 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 could not 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 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 destroys 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 the 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 like 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 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 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 method, we work hard to break through the cover of ignorance. **We use all our energy against ignorance, having no 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/Ahamkara. 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 substantial 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. Because of 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, will not die in one battle at one level. We 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 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.

Pause a moment here and try to identify yourself with this character. With a minor change of words, you 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 act. Hence, the story gives guidance 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 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 with no 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 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 entire 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/ahamkara changes its tactics. Earlier he was a wicked demon, now he comes out as a good one.** The demon king Bali in this story is a righteous 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/ahamkara; 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/ahamkara. 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/ahamkara does not feel any level of threat from this unfamiliar 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. 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 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 expands, 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 - Crude but Dominant Higher Consciousness

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 powerful at this stage and wages a war against the ego/ahamkar.** The ego/ahamkara 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 all the warriors, not just once, but a thousand times presents logical difficulties. Fortunately, we can interpret it 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/ahamkara 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 is losing the battle, 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 assumed 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 started to 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 Ramayana, there is an event where Lord Parashuram meets and challenges Shri Ram to pick up Lord Vishnu’s bow. Shri Ram picks it 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 level, the stage becomes set for his transition to the next level, making the character representing those efforts irrelevant.**

### Level 7 – Shri Ram – Higher Consciousness Becomes Universal Consciousness

**When we read Ramayana, we feel that Shri Ram is a normal person, just like any of us.** Shri Ram, himself, never says that he is Lord Vishnu or behaves like a god. All his actions and feelings are human like. He spends his entire life as a human, with all its limitations, emotions, and problems. At the very end, just before passing away, he becomes Lord Vishnu.

**This last event indicates a magnificent evolution of the consciousness in a human being.** At this stage, a human being can be as godly as humanly possible, while a god can be as humanly as godly possible. We can see the contrast by comparing him with Shri Krishna, the eighth avatar of Lord Vishnu. Right from his birth to death, Shri Krishna is in the god form and never did anything at the human level.

The story of Ramayana is the story of this evolution. Shri Ram as a character represents the consciousness of a normal human. Shri Krishna, on other hand, represents Universal Consciousness. **Shri Ram level takes in a crude level of the consciousness and turns it into a Universal Consciousness.**

**Sage Valmiki, author of Ramayana, saw the difficulties and dangers that we encounter in this evolution.** Out of his compassion, he wrote Ramayana, to guide us through those difficulties and dangers.

The stories we saw until now were simple stories. They had two or three characters. **In Ramayana, we get 20+ characters, amid a long story. All these characters represent various spiritual processes within us. They explain difficult concepts of Samkhya, Yoga, and other important concepts like blind faith.** Thus, Ramayana becomes very complex. We need an entire section to get a high-level overview of Ramayana.

## Spirituality, Paths, Religion, and Faith

### What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is a **study of self**. The Sanskrit term is “Adhyatma”. “Adhya” means study and “atma” means self. **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 full of emotions, with a friendly and balanced outlook towards life, filled with reverence and compassion towards all life, despite ups-and-downs in the life.** **2) We understand our true nature.** There are other benefits like good health, long life, and holistic 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 to know “who am I?” is built-in within you.** It will make you study spirituality.

Reader: 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 the above information changes**.** Sometimes 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 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?”

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 the 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 from appendix.** It takes only a few minutes to read it. When you understand it, you will get the 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, but they are equally difficult to understand.

Reader: I think direct knowledge is not the 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 the island will take you to water, all of the 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?

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 decide for yourself. When you are trying different paths, you need to be careful about one thing. **Each path uses keywords, with a specific meaning attached to them. Different paths use the same key word with different meaning.** For example, in the path of Devotion, words like God and Faith are very important. Path of Yoga has these keywords 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: **Where do we classify Yoga amongst the four major paths?**

### Where Do We Classify Yoga Amongst the Four Major Paths?

Yoga is a mix of path of Karma and path of knowledge. Karma is involved because we do Yoga, and we expect results from of this action. Wherever the doer and expectation of results is involved, the Karma is unavoidable. In addition, we want to know the nature of consciousness. Hence, path of knowledge is also there.

Reader: What are the beliefs and practices of the people who follow Yoga?

Author: **The people who follow Yoga 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 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 even 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 the 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.**

Reader: It is interesting to know that spirituality can be approached from many ways. **Are there any pre-conditions for starting a spiritual study?**

### Are There Any Pre-Conditions for Starting Spiritual Study?

Yes. There are pre-conditions for starting a spiritual study. Those, who do not meet these pre-conditions, will gain nothing or learn anything about spirituality.

1. Introspection: We need to ask regularly ourselves questions like “Am I happy?”, or” Am I living the best I could?”, or “Does anything inside me need to change?” etc. **A person needs to understand himself, his behavior, and his nature, before he can change himself.**
2. Honesty: Here honesty means being honest to yourself about yourself. **An honest person instinctively knows that there is a scope of improvement within himself.** A dis-honest person does not ask the troublesome questions, or he comes up with answers like “I am very happy all the time”. Many times, he may feel that something is wrong, but his answer is “There is a need of change, but someone else like other person or society etc. should change”. Since this person finds nothing wrong in himself, he will not think he needs to improve and make a change.
3. Questioning with the right attitude: Sometimes, a person insists that he should be given all the answers, and when he is satisfied with the answers, then he will perform experiments. This person will never get all the answers and he will not perform any experiments. **Questioning for the sake of satisfying intellectual curiosity is not a right attitude.** Questioning to learn and improve oneself is the right attitude.
4. Ability to perform experiments as told to you: Just like any science, theory and practice go hand-in-hand. **Therefore, avoid analysis paralysis (too much over thinking) and perform the experiments, and see if you get any results.**
5. Comparison of results: We need to ask questions like “Did I get anything out of the experiment I just did?” or “Are my results comparable to results mentioned in book or class?” For example, as an experiment, you did mediation or attended a Yoga class. The results mentioned in class are “You will feel calm after the class”. Did I really feel calm? We have to compare the results. **Only when we compare the results, and our results match to the results mentioned in book/class, we take the rest of the book or class seriously. At that point, we begin our study.** On the contrary, an experiment that promises benefits in the distant future, like going to heaven etc., which you cannot verify, is not a spiritual experiment.

Reader: What is the correct age to get into it?

Author: **Age is not a factor in spirituality.** We think when we are old, we will be mature with life experiences, and then it will be easy to understand spirituality. This assumption is not correct. Being old does not help anyone understand spirituality. This assumption is just a clever way to postpone working on spirituality. A person making this assumption does not meet the pre-conditions.

Young person, who is full of plans and dreams of future, busy with study, job, or social media etc. think spirituality is boring or not popular and postpone working on it. Such a person will benefit from spirituality. **It will help them have a healthy body to enjoy life, a healthy mind that can take the stress of the modern-day life, and balanced outlook that will keep them away from bad habits and additions. Thus, it will help them achieve and live their plans and dreams.**

In addition, can anyone say that he will live 10 more years for sure? Death can come at any moment to anyone. The work that you put in into the spirituality will be useful in facing the death. Therefore, there is no reason to postpone study of spirituality at any age.

**Reader: What difficulties I may face?**

Author: Spirituality is a long path. It is a lifetime pursuit. It changes every aspect of your life. Therefore, there are always difficulties. We will see the most common difficulties and the guidance given to us about how we can handle those difficulties.

For a beginner, the nature of difficulties relates to the body pain, inability of mind to stay on task and fear of unknown. However, the help is available for everyone. **In Yoga, they say that “A guru will come to the student the moment the student is ready to receive the help”.**

**Reader: Is spiritual study same as religious study?**

### Is Spiritual Study Same as Religious Study?

We saw pre-conditions and the goal of spirituality. **If a religious study meets these conditions and goals, then it is same as spiritual study.**

My favorite story is that of a mythological swan bird. It is said that if you give a mixture of water and milk to this bird, it will drink only milk from that mixture, leaving the water behind. **The knowledge about spirituality is hidden in the religious texts.** It is up to a student to separate them and take the spiritual knowledge and use it for his advantage. It is possible that two people study the same religious text and get two different views of it.

Reader: How do I know that I am getting a wrong view by studying the religious texts?

Author: **You read it slowly, over a long time. If you feel that you understood very little of it, then you are on a right track.** If you read the entire text in brief span, memorized it, and started quoting it to others, it is likely that you got the wrong idea from it.

If you get into “us vs. them” type of thinking, then you are going in the wrong direction. If you want to influence others into accepting your view, then you have a wrong view. If you want to defend your religion, or find faults of other religion, then you understood nothing at all.

One way to read a scripture is to take a few of verses of that scripture as a very complex puzzle. You work on this verse as a puzzle for years. Suddenly, when you are least expecting, the verse will reveal its meaning to you.

The best way to read these texts is to compare your current understanding with the texts. You may come across a verses that match your understanding. You feel that “I understand this verse the same way, and scriptures have expressed it elegantly”.

**Reader: Why do we spill so much blood in the name of religion?**

### Why Do We Spill So Much Blood in The Name of Religion?

We have seen a lot of violence in the name of religion. Whenever there is a violence, everyone instinctively believes that the blood was spilled because of religion. However, when we look closely at the reason of violence, we can see that the main three primary root causes of conflict:

* + **Economics:** It means the competition for markets or resources like money, gold, or natural resources like oil resulting into violent conflicts.
  + **State:** It means claiming a territory for governance and advancing its interests resulting a war.
  + **Politics:** It means competition for power within a state resulting a civil war.

You can verify above statements easily. Take any conflict that used a religion as a basis and trace its root cause. Ask several questions about the root cause. Why did the conflict start in first place? Who started it? Who benefits from this conflict? Did the people, who murdered an innocent and helpless human, ever studied the religion to which they belong? You will find out that religion was not the root cause.

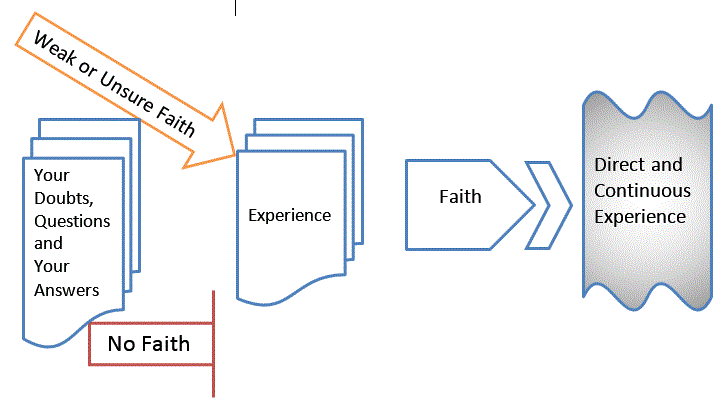
In all the conflicts we have seen, religion is used an instrument to gather wider support and claim legitimacy to the conflict. **Religion alone has never been a root cause of any conflict. However, once the conflict starts, more and more people are sucked into the conflict and the battle lines are drawn between religions.** This happens because humans live in groups and religion is one of the ways we form a group. All other types of groups have “us vs. them” type thinking, and they fight each other.

Warfare and aggression are natural to humans because of the biological desires of survival and reproduction. **Because of Natural Selection, the genes of a fittest person, who can win in a fight survives.** Warfare exists even in most tribal human societies. Religions came into existence 5000 years ago, but humans are fighting for last 70,000 years. Hence, religion is surely not a primary cause of wars.

**Reader: What is a faith? How do I become faithful?**

### What Is a Faith? How Do I Become Faithful?

Faith is an important topic in spirituality. Taking faith as the basis, we can classify people into four types. It will answer above questions.



1. Those who have blind faith:

The accepted meaning of the word blind faith is “putting too much faith without seeking evidence.” However, the word “blind” is not the right word to describe the nature of this type of faith. The word blind shows a permanent disability. **It is not the case with blind faith, because it can be corrected.**

If we carefully scrutinize ourselves regarding our faith, we see that we have some faith, but there are some unanswered questions. For example, if we seriously ask ourselves the question – Do I believe in God or truth? The answer may be yes, but it may not be resounding confirmation. The presence of the doubt itself means that we do not have a “blind faith.” **The correct term, to describe our faith, would be the “weak or unsure faith.”**

1. Those who reject faith

We start with blind faith as our cultures teach it to us right from childhood. Some retain their faith “as is”. Some dare to question its underlying assumptions. **For some, the answers they get do not satisfy them at all. Hence, they reject everything related to faith.** It is a perfectly valid position. However, it restricts the availability of options to them.

The lotus flower, often seen in books on and classes of Yoga, is a symbolic suggestion that even though lotus grows in the mud, it rises above it. **Like a lotus flower, the faith of a person arises from life experiences, which has both good and bad experiences.** Those who reject faith because of doubts make a mistake; by rejecting the mud, they reject the possibility of the blossoming of a lotus too. **They reject all possibilities of progress, which leads them to have the same life experiences as before.** It is perfectly valid and correct view of that person, and no one has a right to challenge it.

1. Those who have faith

We can compare weak / unsure faith to the long and dark night, in which, there is no evidence or experience of light. Something similar happens when faith arises in a person. There is no guarantee or evidence of god or god-ness; however, a faint memory of a non-ordinary experience is there. **This single experience, which feels almost like a dream, is sufficient to help a person transition from weak / unsure faith to faith.**

**The rise of faith is a miracle. There is no logical explanation to support its claims.** We can compare faith with the event horizon of a black hole. No one can return after crossing this imaginary line. Once a person feels faith growing within him, he cannot do anything to undo its presence or effects. The reason for this compelling force is the occasional or accidental bruises with something far-greater-than-oneself. **This person cannot deny the existence of these experiences. Hence, even at the risk of name calling by others, he must go on.**

1. Those who have a direct experience of god or truth

Finally, there are those who have a direct and continuous experience of god or truth or whatever they may or may not call it. **Direct and continuous experience is the best experience a human can expect to happen to him. It is the final frontier of our inner world.**

Reader: I would like to understand more about the weak or unsure faith. Can you explain what it is and how do I detect it?

### What Is Weak or Unsure Faith? How Do I Detect Weak or Unsure Faith?

Weak / unsure faith is one where we have no experience of anything related to god. Yet, we believe in god. We may pray to god as much as we like, but somewhere, a thorny doubt about god’s existence keeps piercing us. **This doubt is precious. It can help us identify our weak/ unsure faith.** With a quick litmus test of logic given below, we can expose these doubts quickly. Please note that we are using word faith in the context of the Yoga only.

### Experiment – Detect Blind Faith

Wherever you are praying for god, look at the idol or statue, or whatever you are praying to. You surely see that it is constructed out of some material, be it a rock, wood or cement. Inspect the place, where you are standing or sitting for these prayers. **You see that you are standing on the same material that has made up your object of worship.** For example, you can see that the object of worship comprises stone or cement. The same stone or cement is used to make the steps of the place of worship of**. In other words, see that you are praying in front of the stone, wood, cement by stepping on some other stone or wood, or cement!**

The idol represents something much more than just a material, but you have doubts about it, which is what we are discussing here. If you exactly know whom you are praying to, then you have a faith in you, and you do not need this experiment.

**Your assumption in praying in front of the stone, wood, and cement seems to be that it can play a role in doing good things for you or someone else.** **If a particular material, in the form of an idol, can somehow play a role in doing good things for you, then you have to assume that other rocks, on which you are stepping, can play a role in doing bad things.** Now, you have created a problem for yourself, as the idols are only one or two in number, but the rocks you have stepped on, are countless; in the end, you are surely at a loss.

By our experience, we know that people who promise to do good things may or may not do them in time. However, the people, who intend to do bad things, will surely do it and that too, wasting no time. **By this logic, it is much better if you do not pray at all, as it creates more trouble than it does any good to you.**

**If the logic mentioned above seems right and applicable to you, then you have a weak/ unsure faith.** The doubt about god or truth that you had in your mind has done its job. It has brought you to the right path.

Reader: I feel that the logic explained above is right. It means that I have weak or unsure faith. **How do I correct weak or unsure faith?**

### How Do I Correct Weak or Unsure Faith?

Author: Look at the diagram again. You see that only an experience can take you from weak or unsure faith to faith. To get an experience, you need to fulfill the pre-conditions of spirituality that we saw earlier. Those pre-conditions are introspection, honesty, questioning, perform experiments and compare results.

Reader: How do I introspect my weak or unsure faith?

Author: We need to understand the reasons. Why do we have weak or unsure faith? Then, we need to figure out if those reasons make sense. **If they do not make sense, then the foundation of weak or unsure faith will weaken.**

The reasons below are most common reasons.

1. **People believe in God because their parents or priests told them that God exists.** The logic is that everyone seems to know that God exists and therefore God must exist.
2. For other people, God is the creator; He created the universe. **If the creation exists, the creator must exist too.** It is the same logic that says if an earthen pot exists, there must be a living or dead potter who created it.
3. **The belief in God helps us discriminate between good and bad deeds.** We are told to do “good” things and to avoid doing “sinful” things to please God. This becomes a moral code and helps society run smoothly. In turn, God grants our wishes here on earth or in heaven.

Let us see if these reasons make sense to us.

* To answer #1 reason above, there is nobody we have met, seen, or even heard that has confirmed Gods existence. Yet, we believe in God. **This argument is like a blind person leading another blind person.**
* To answer #2 reason above, science has already proved it to us that there are billions of galaxies formed because of Big Bang. **God as the creator of the universe does not get along with science.**
* To answer #3 reason above, doing “good” things in order to please God, and expecting something in return sounds like greed or barter. Not doing something “sinful” to avoid the punishment of going to hell is nothing but fear. **Even if we are to stay away from greed and fear, the problem these standards create does not end.** See next bullet point.
* **The lists of “good or bad” things become a standard, which everybody is expected to follow.** Take any history book, and you see that the worst crimes are committed in the name of these standards (e.g. Sati tradition or Inquisition). **The people, who committed such a crime, were regular people like us. They believed that they were doing was “good.”** We too, could commit such a crime by blindly following such a standard.

Reader: Now, I see that the arguments supporting blind faith do not make any sense. I also see that there is a substantial downside of blind faith. It seems it is worthwhile to spend some time to understand Spirituality. **Where do I begin?**

### Where Do I Begin?

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.** 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 thinks he is young or old, clever or not, physically fit or not, etc. Sometimes a person may think it is better for him to study something else and complete it, instead of starting a study of spirituality and leaving it half way.

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

Reader: What knowledge do I need before beginning?

Author: This may sound counter-intuitive, but lessor you know, the better suited are you to learn about spirituality. The preconceived notions of knowledge become an impediment in learning. **Hence, it is best to approach this topic in a childlike state of mind – curious, questioning, and open to learn.**

## Yoga’s Theory and Practice

### What EXACTLY Is the Meaning of the Word Yoga?

**Yoga translates to “union”.** **A commonly accepted meaning of this term that a Yogi follows to unite with the divine.** But there is a problem with this translation. Yoga does not have a concept of divine. Word divine, even in English, comes from root “dev”, which means an “external god”. There is no concept of an external God in Yoga. Sage Patanjali’s word is “Ishwara” which we can interpret as “to become best version of yourself”. Truly, a Yogi is a person committed to become best version of himself by walking on the path of Yoga.

Let us step back from sage Patanjali’s world into our world. How do we understand the word “union”? The most common use of this word is a marriage. It is a union between a man and a woman to become a family. **Naturally, the word union implies that two are distinct entities, which are equal, independent, and complete each other. They come together to become one.**

Let’s take a humorous example. Assume that a common person wishes to marry a famous movie star.From the common man’s side, it is understandable that he wants to marry a movie start. But if you think from movie start’s side, is there any reason for a movie star to marry a common man?

As we saw above, most people understand word Yoga means union of a person with divine. We can understand that a person has a keen desire to join with so-called divine. However, why would the divine unite with this person? What does it stand to gain out of this union? **Here, the two sides of union are not equal, and they do not complete each other.** In addition, will this union work, if one side, the divine, is unknown, unavailable, or inaccessible to other side, the person? Something is missing from our understanding of the meaning of word Yoga. Hence, we need to ask deeper questions.

By the time we come to ask the deep questions about the meaning of Yoga, we have spent years on the Yoga mat. During this time, we had practiced Yoga to the best of our capacity. We have seen the power of Yoga in terms of its physical and mental benefits. We have committed ourselves to lifelong practice of Yoga, and yet the ultimate aim of Yoga, “to unite with divine” remains elusive. Am I correct?

As a Yogi, we go by our experience and we do not accept any assumptions. There is no use of word “faith” in practice of Yoga. So, why do we assume the existence of the divine without any proof of its existence? We cannot accept anything that we did not experience ourselves firsthand on Yoga mat. So, let’s see what we experienced on Yoga mat.

The years of practice has showed us a different side of ourselves. We have seen that at times, something within us guides us to do certain poses. Earlier the same pose looked impossible, even after tremendous efforts. But in that particular moment, the pose comes easily to us as if we were cast into it. We experience the tingling sensations at the tip of our hands. We come to know that it is called as an Energy in Yoga.

In addition, when we do Yoga, we get a calm and serene feeling. For a moment, we experience a peace! This peace comes to us when we practice meditation after doing Yoga. Occasionally, that same feeling comes to us uninvited, while doing other activities too. We come to know that it is called as a Consciousness in Yoga.

So far, we established that there are 3 intermingled entities on the Yoga mat – a Yogi, the Energy and the Consciousness in his body. We also know that Yoga means union, but the divine aspect of the union is questionable.

To understand the term Yoga, meaning union, we need ask these questions – **Which two entities are coming together? What is the reason for them to come together? How do they work together? What happens to them when their goals are met? Does this union end?**

Yoga’s parent thought system is Samkhya. It had a significant influence on sage Patanjali. Samkhya defines the key terms used by sage Patanjali – Energy and Consciousness. It also tells is why they come together. **Samkhya says, “The union of Consciousness with the Energy is for wish to know “who am I?”. The union of Energy with Consciousness is for liberation of itself”.**  Samkhya further gives an analogy to understand this union**. It says, “This union is like the union of a lame man with a blind man, going towards the same direction”.**

Now the term “union” becomes crystal-clear. As a process of Yoga, it the Energy and Consciousness that are uniting with each other in the body of a Yogi. Let us take an analogy of marriage. We have attended many wedding ceremonies. Our current situation is similar to those wedding ceremonies. T**wo people, the Energy and the Consciousness are marrying with each other, we are just a guest attending this wedding ceremony!** Truthfully, this marriage will go on with or without us. It is best for us to be present and enjoy their union.

**We are doing Yoga, we are definitely a part of the process.** Hence, we expect thatwhatever the answers we may get, they must relate to us, in the present moment.In addition, the answers must be consistent with the overall framework of Yoga, as intended by sage Patanjali.

Let’s go back to Samkhya to get more details on this union. But first let’s look at a above mentioned story from Samkhya Karika.

### Does Yoga Have a Theory?

**The fundamental concepts of Yoga like consciousness and energy come from a philosophical system called as Samkhya. Thus, Samkhya is a parent thought system of Yoga and many other systems. Yoga is one of the ways to the reach the goal defined by Samkhya.**

Sanskrit word “Samkhya” means “digits or numbers”. It is a way of thinking allows us to classify the various components within ourselves. It explains the science by giving proofs, reasons, and conclusions.

Reader: Will learning theory help me in my Yoga practice?

Author: Let us take an example of building a house. Humans have built houses since the beginning of our history. Only when we started using Mathematics, we built stronger and taller houses. Similarly, we are doing Yoga without learning Samkhya. **It works, but it can work better, if we do Yoga with understanding of Samkhya.**

Yoga is a practice that will give you an experience. Samkhya is a theory that will help you understand that experience. **Shvetashvatra Upanishad hyphenates them together as Samkhya-Yoga. It says, “Logic and practice go hand-in-hand to comprehend Him (Universal Consciousness).”**

Reader: The term Yoga is widely used. Its meaning seems to change based on the context it is used. I want to know the precise meaning of this term, the way it was used by sage Patanjali. **In the context of Yoga-Sutra, can you explain what EXACTLY the meaning of the term Yoga is?**

### Story: Blind Man and Lame Man

Once there was a caravan of travelers. In that caravan, there was a blind man and a lame man. When the caravan was in a dense jungle, robbers attacked the caravan. All other travelers panicked and ran away. However, the blind man and the lame man were helpless. They wanted to run away, but they could not. With some good luck, they met each other. **The blind man carried the lame on his back, while the lame man gave the directions.** They escaped the robbers and came out of jungle. **When they met their other fellow travelers, the lame man got off from the blind man’s back.**

**The term union also implies three different conditions – pre-union, union, and post-union.** Using the analogy of marriage as a union, we can easily understand these three stages - a man and a woman are single (pre-union), they marry (union), and later their marriage ends because one partner may die, or they get divorce (post-union).

### Pre-Union:

### Identify the Two Entities That Become One:

Let us get to know the Energy and the Consciousness individually.Samkhya describes that the material world created by the Energy as, “The material world always **active** (think atoms – they are always moving). There is a **cause** for existence of every item. All items **decay**. All items have specific **measurements** like length and width and those measurements are not endless. All items are created by **mixing two items** into each other (think H2O - a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen to create water). We can **divide** any item into smaller parts. One item in the material world **depends** upon some other item. In this way, material world creates **numerous and unique items**.”

We need to understand above properties of the material world. **We see that all the properties describe above apply to our body. When we apply these properties to a body part within us, we know that the body part is made from the Energy.**

Let us quickly review how the Energy creates the material world. First, the Energy creates a Space life-element. Thereafter, within the Space life-element, the Energy creates Air, Fire, Water, and finally Earth life-elements, in that sequence. Everything that Energy creates has a quality called as Guna. There are three gunas – Rajas, Tamas, and Sattva. **The three gunas are the most important findings of Samkhya. Thus, energy creates our world, including our body, using five life-elements.** The “life” within us comes from the consciousness. Our mind, desires, thoughts, intellect, ego/Ahamkar and memory comes from consciousness. We will see more details about these in later sections.

Samkhya describes the consciousness as “Consciousness has the following characteristics: **Witnessing** – it neither acts not desist from acting. **Isolation** – it is isolated or different from all the activities that happen because of energy. **Indifference** – it gives no regard or value to any of the activities of energy. **Perception** – it always aware and understands the activities of energy. **Inactivity** – It does not act at all.”

The properties of consciousness help us separate the consciousness from the energy. Our consciousness, in its purest state, exhibits above characteristics. We may not understand them at this moment. **The goal of Yoga is to see the consciousness in its purest state.**

### Identify Their Current Conditions:

We can understand the properties of the energy easily. It is difficult to understand the properties of the consciousness. However, we realize that both the energy and consciousness are operating within us. Let is find out their current condition within us.

**The consciousness has completely forgotten its true nature.** It has become the Mind. The mind keeps on creating thoughts, desires etc. that binds us. Our identity is defined by our ego/ahamkar. It isolates us from rest of the world.

**On energy side, the current condition of energy is more pitiable.** It is held captive by none other than Ego/ahamkar! Our body has large amount of the energy. However, we get a very feeble supply of the energy. The rest of the energy is locked up in storehouse. This locked up energy needs a release. It wants to function freely. It seeks a liberation from the bondage.

### Reasons for Which They Come Together:

As we saw earlier, the consciousness has a wish to know itself. **This wish has two phases – enjoyment and contemplation.** Our present condition, where consciousness has forgotten its true nature, is the enjoyment phase. **By forgetting its true nature, by dividing itself, and by being entangled with energy, it gets to know itself.**

This enjoyment phase has gone too far. It has created problems. Now, we do not get a break from activities of mind. It keeps on creating new desires within us. The constant activity of mind creates stress within us. We want that stress to go away. **We want to have peace. We come to Yoga in search of the peace.** Now, we are on the Yoga mat. We also want to know “who am I”. At this point, the enjoyment phase is over. The contemplation phase begins. Now, the consciousness is seeking union with energy. **It needs the energy, so it can contemplate and fulfill its wish to know “who am I”.**

From the energy’s side, the reason of its union with the consciousness is easy to understand. Currently, it is locked up. It is not allowed to function freely. **Hence, it seeks liberation from the bondage. When consciousness will realize its true nature, activities of mind will stop. The grip of ego/ahamkar on energy will become loose. It will give energy a chance to liberate itself and express itself freely. When the energy is expressing herself freely, it is infinity creative!**

When we try to understand this pre-union condition, we get several questions: **does the mind ever become calm?** We have not seen it stop even a second. Hence, it is hard for us to believe that mind stops. We do not believe that we have large amount of the energy within our body either. Hence, we do not understand that the energy is in bondage and it is seeking liberation. These type of questions and doubts set the background for our Yoga practice.

### Union:

To recap, we saw that pre-union state has two entities – energy and consciousness. They have their reasons to come together. Energy wants liberation and consciousness wants to “who am I?” In addition, we have our mental stress and other problems. We hope that Yoga will help us manage them. We also have questions and doubts about the energy and consciousness.

We turn to Yoga Sutra to look for the answers. Sage Patanjali answers above questions in first three lines. “This is the law/discipline/order/framework of Yoga. When mind stops running, the natural state of pure observer (consciousness) is experienced.”

When we read above line, most people, including myself, misread it. We force mind to stop. It does not work. Above line is like saying, “when clouds go away, we see the Sun”. It is telling us a fact or law.

Sage Patanjali did not refer to the energy in above three lines. It is implied in word Yoga. Since we understand energy easily, we can reword his statements using energy in it as follow:

**This discipline teaches how to conserve energy, to release energy, and to channelize it. This energy unites with consciousness. In that union, the mind stops running and natural state of pure observer (consciousness) is experienced.**

As you can see, there are four major parts of this statement. They are – a) conserve the energy, b) release more energy and channelize it, c) merge the energy with consciousness and finally, d) experience the consciousness. Sage Patanjali dedicated two steps for each part. Out of eight steps of Yoga, first four focus on energy. The rest of the four focus on consciousness.

### Steps to Conserve Energy:

We use electricity every day. It is a form of the energy. When we do not need an electrical appliance, like electric bulbs etc., we turn it off. It saves us electricity. In turn, we can use that electricity for some other useful purpose.

Our body and mind also use a lot of the energy. Hence, we have to make similar trade-offs about the energy too. **To avoid the energy lost in unproductive activities, sage Patanjali came up with these rules.** They work as a guard against the energy going outwards.

Generally, we ignore the first two steps. We assume these two steps as lists of “to-dos” or “not-to-do” rules. **The purpose of these rules is not to serve as a moral code of a society or religion.** Hence, we need to review them carefully with their intended purpose.

Consider a situation where a person tells a lie. To do so, he must have an intension to deceive someone. He spends some time in thinking and planning about it. Then, he comes up with a lie to tell. Then, he must remember that lie for a long time. All these efforts take energy. This energy is lost forever! Hence, Sage Patanjali recommends us not waste the energy in lies.

Following the rules will save us the energy that goes towards outside worldly objects:

1. **Do Not Harm Others:** By abandoning hostility towards others, we save our energy for ourselves.
2. **Do Not Lie:** Truthfulness saves us the energy we spend in thinking lie and remembering a lie.
3. **Do Not Steal:** It saves the energy we spend in planning and doing activities to steal and conceal theft.
4. **Do Not Lust:** It saves the energy we spend in thinking and doing activities to fulfill lust.
5. **Do Not Be Possessive about Material Things:** It saves the energy we spend in obsessing about the material things.

The second step is to save the energythat is used internally by our body-mind**.** For example, consider a situation where a person is unhappy. To do so, he must have a strong desire of something. Then, he looks for ways to fulfil that desire. When he cannot fulfil his desire for some reason, he becomes unhappy again. All these efforts consume a lot of energy. When a person is happy or content in what he has, he saves his energy. We can similar pattern in all five rules:

1. **Cleanliness:** Impure body becomes sick. It takes a lot of energy to get back to normal.
2. **Be Content:** Unhappiness means a lot of thinking, which is a waste of energy.
3. **Intense Discipline (\*):** It removes impurities of bad habits. It also cleans the sense organs. It allows us to see things “as they are” as opposed to “imagining them”.
4. **Observe Yourself (\*):** Do not spend the energy in observing, judging and thinking about others.
5. **Think of Thoughts About Divinity:** Whatever you type of thoughts you think, it is going to consume your energy. Since we keep thinking some or the other thoughts, it is better if we think the thoughts about divinity than any other type of thoughts. It is a way to avoid getting distracted and keeps us focused. When it is time to let go of all thoughts, it is easier to let go of the thoughts about divinity!

Note: The rules with \* are very important. If these two rules are not observed, there is no use of following other rules. The Sanskrit words are “Tapah” and “Swadhyay”. They have additional meanings than given above.

### Steps to Release and Channelize the Energy:

A copper wire is an excellent conductor of electricity. The electricity flows thru the wires of the other metals too. However, they are not a good conductor of electricity. When electricity flows through the wires of the poor conductor, there is a loss of the electricity and the wire heats up! Something similar happen within our body too.

In previous two steps, we saw the rules to conserve the energy. We need our body to behave like a god conductor of the electricity, so that the energy can flow. Our body can behave as a good conductor or as a bad conductor of the electricity. It depends upon the physical and mental wellbeing of a person. The body of an unwell person behaves like a bad conductor. In such person, the energy cannot move freely. It creates imbalances in body or mind.

We all have some or the other type of imbalance. Luckily, we can fix those imbalances. **We can clear the path of the energy within us. Precisely, that is the role of Asana and Pranayama.** Let us see what sage Patanjali says about them.

Sage Patanjali says, “**A pose needs to be easy and steady**”. Here is a problem – we do not know any pose that is easy for us. **Even the easiest pose, where we sit cross-legged, called as Easy Pose/Sukhasana, is very challenging for us! It hurts so much to sit in Easy pose.** We cannot sit like that even for 15-20 minutes. **Hence, the question that comes to our mind - does the Easy Pose ever become easy?**

Sage Patanjali gives the answer in next verse. He says, “**This occurs only when we let go of all the efforts**”. He gave a very clear guidance – initially, take a lot of efforts in doing various other poses. After that take an Easy pose and then let go of efforts. Only then, Easy pose will be easy and steady.

This statement raises one more question – **at what point, do we let go of the efforts?** This answer will come from your body. At a certain point in practice, your body begins to “tell” you the correct poses. You start to feel the energy at fingertips or at the spine. This energy starts to stretch you, as if you are being pulled. Your stomach may roll up. Your body automatically wants to take a picture-perfect pose. You see that you are taking poses that you thought you could not do. You feel you can hold a pose forever!

If something similar starts to happen, let it happen. Step aside. Let energy within body take the pose it needs. One you let it, this energy will take control of your body. Allow the energy to run freely. This is an extremely fortunate moment in your life. Now, you have undeniable proof that the energy exits in your body. After this point, when you take the Easy pose, it will be easy, and you can hold it for a long time.

While your body is busy taking a pose, what should your mind do? Sage Patanjali say, “**Keep your attention your breath**”. In this way, the third step of Asana smoothly leads us to the fourth step of Pranayama.

We synchronize our breath while taking the poses. In these poses, initially, we take a lot of efforts. At certain point, we let go of the effort. We use a similar pattern in breathing too. Initially, when we are taking poses, we take an effort in controlling the breath. We do forceful inhalation and exhalation. We retain breath in the belly for a long time. We also do the rapid breathing from the stomach. These activities take efforts. Just as in poses, when you are ready to let go of efforts, we let of efforts in breathing too. At that moment, we are doing Pranayama! **The efforts we took in breathing is just a preparatory step for Pranayama.**

At this point, as sage Patanjali suggested, we let go of efforts and we focus our attention on breathing. When we keep our attention on breath, the breath may become very short. We may get to observe a pause between the outgoing breath and the incoming breath. At some point, our breath may stop completely. At that time, we experience the consciousness – the natural state of pure observer. Enjoy this moment!

Pranayama is extremely critical to the practice of Yoga. Hence, let us explore it in-depth. The most common question about the Pranayama is – **what is the difference between the breathing during any other exercise like running or swimming, and breathing during Yoga?**

### Difference between Breathing during Other Exercises and Pranayama

All exercises focus on the breath. Breath gives the oxygen supply to the body. Proper breathing gives stamina for sustaining exercise. Focusing on the breath improves the concentration of mind. It also increases our alertness about body and surroundings. Hence, breathing helps all exercises including Yoga and other activities too. **Nonetheless, breathing to get more oxygen is not Pranayama.**

The answer lies in understanding the word Prana. Pranayama is a composite word of “Prana” and “Ayama”. We do not have a clear idea about the term Prana. Hence, we must know the answer to the question – **what is the meaning of the term “Prana”?**

### Meaning of the Word Prana:

When we research books and internet, the experts tell us that Prana is the “Life Force”. However, this term too explains nothing at all. Since this is an extremely critical concept, we will explore it a little more.

**Prana is a form of the energy that maintains autonomous activities having neutral sensations. An activity is a series of similar sensations in a short time. Thus, in short, Prana is an autonomous neutral sensation.**

The most prominent autonomous activity is the beating of heart. We cannot control our heartbeat. We can increase heart rate by doing a strenuous activity. However, it is a temporary change.

Generally, we are not aware of activities of prana at all. However, if we pay close attention, we can get the sensation of these activities. There is no pain or pleasure associated with sensations of Prana. The heart pains because of acidity in stomach is not a Prana. Similarly, a pain because of injury is not a Prana.

A hiccup or movement of eyelid is because of an activity of the Prana. Our entire body has similar autonomous activities with the neutral sensations. They keep on working without us doing anything at all. When they stop working, we die. This brings the next question to our mind – when we die, our sensations surely die. Does Prana also die with us?

We take in the Prana from outside. We use it to function our body. When a body cannot function because of a medical reason, like heart failure, the Prana cannot be put to any use. Hence, body stops taking in Prana from outside. Without energy from Prana, the other activities of body stop too. **Thus, when a person dies, the Prana does not die. Prana is a form of energy. We know that we cannot destroy energy!**

Yoga defines ten type of Prana within a body. They are classified as major Prana and minor Prana. Heart beating and digesting food is two of the five major Prana activities. Hiccup, movement of eyelid, and yawning is three of five minor Prana activities.

### Meaning of the Word Ayama:

At the beginning, we saw that the energy needs liberation from clutches of ego/ahamkar. This energy is locked up at the base of the spine. In addition to maintaining all the autonomous activities, **Prana has one more critical role – to activate the locked-up Energy at the Muladhara Chakra at base of spine.**

For this reason, when we are doing Pranayama, we direct our breath to the base of the spine. **The word “Ayama” means an extension.** From heart, we push our breath to the stomach. From stomach, we push the breath to base of spine. Along with breath, Prana gets extended, and it reaches to the base of spine. Remember that Prana is a form of the energy. **Just as one fire can ignite the other fire, Prana activates the energy at the base of the spine.**

**This energy differs from Prana.** As we saw, Prana is neutral. It does not feel hot or cold. However, the energy at the base of spine is hot. It heats the body. Hence, when we do the Pranayama, we sweat. Remember the poor conductor of the electricity - it heats up! It happens in our body too. In addition, a person may feel powerful waves of vibrations radiating from the base of spine. Sometimes, a person can hear a buzzing sound, similar to the high voltage electricity passing thru wire. Sometimes there may be a tingling sensation in the head. When that happens, you have succeeded in the Pranayama. You are ready to go to the next step.

### Steps to Merge Energy with Consciousness:

As per sage Patanjali, the next step is Pratyahara. When we look up the meaning of this word on the internet, **we get that the Pratyahara means “withdrawal of the senses”. It is very difficult to understand the meaning of these words.** In addition, sage Patanjali does not mention any pose or technique associated with it. Thus, we are lost. We need to backtrack our steps to get a further direction.

In previous steps, we conserved the energy (Yama and Niyama). We also worked on releasing the energy (Pranayama) and channelizing it towards head via spine (Asana). As a result, what do we have? **We have a lot of energy moving in the body! All we have to do now is to ride on the waves of the energy - that is Pratyahara.**

We saw that the first four steps of Yoga focus on the energy. In these steps, there is some action for us. Now, we are on the next four steps that focus on the consciousness. **In these steps, the key is complete inaction.** We do not judge the sensations in body or thought in mind. Here, we just observe. There is no need of doing anything from our side. Hence, sage Patanjali did not mention any technique for Pratyahara.

Doing Asana and Pranayama activates the energy within the body. It is also a very hard work. Naturally, we get tired. Hence, after doing Asana and Pranayama, we sit in an Easy pose. **We close our eyes and watch our breath. We seamlessly move into Pratyahara. It happens automatically!**

As we watch our breath, it slows down considerably. Then, our attention naturally goes to the sensations within the body. **Highly active energy creates several new sensations in the body. In Pratyahara, we pay close attention to these sensations within the body.** Starting from toes, we move our attention slowly to each body parts. There may or may not be any sensation in that body part. When we find a sensation, we remain neutral about it. Some examples of the sensations are – heat, tingling, sound, and vibrations etc. Paying attention to these sensations and remaining neutral about them is Pratyahara. Now, we can understand its true meaning:

By nature, our senses look towards outside stimuli. Eyes look outside, and ears hear the sound. Sage Patanjali calls the outside stimuli of senses as “food of the senses (Ahara)”. The word “Prati” means the “opposite”. **We intentionally turn senses away from the outside stimuli and look for the internal stimuli - that is Pratyahara.**

Next step is called Dharana. In Pratyahara, we focused on the senses. **Our mind is both sense and an organ. Hence, we need a special way to turn mind inwards.** Dharana is like Pratyahara, applied to the mind.

When we search the internet and the books for meaning of Dharana, we get its meaning as concentration. Some websites equate our mind to a domestic animal tied to a leash – it can wonder around, but only to a certain extent. These are wrong interpretations.

Concentration is an active process. To concentrate, we need use our energy. We may be able to keep our mind on a specific object by force for a short period. Afterwards, we get tired, and then our mind wonders away. Our mind is already energetic. Adding more energy to it, makes it even more restless.

To treat mind as an animal on leash (so it cannot wonder away) is ridiculous. It defeats the purpose of doing Yoga. We are better off, when we treat ourselves with kindness and compassion.

The word “Dharana” comes from root word “Dhar”. It means to hold. **We know that we cannot hold the mind. The only thing that we can hold is our body. So, we hold our body in an Easy Pose.** Once we are comfortable, we lock down the pose. We avoid slight movements. It helps to us focus only on the mind.

**The mind stops wondering when we do not give energy to its thoughts.** We acknowledge that there are thoughts. However, we do not react to them. We do not try to stop them. Let mind wonder wherever it wants to go. We just observe. Without energy, it will stop soon. Be patient and compassionate to yourselves.

**When its energy runs out, mind will turn inwards. For the first time, it will see the consciousness – the natural and pure observer. Mind will instantly recognize this consciousness as its original state and merge itself into consciousness.** Now, for the first time, we understand the meaning of words of sage Patanjali - When mind stops running, the natural state of pure observer (consciousness) is experienced.”

Remember that the consciousness had forgotten its nature, and it had become the mind. It needs a reminder of its original nature at the perfect moment. **We follow the entire process of Yoga to create this perfect moment for the remembering. When it happens, the mind transforms itself back into consciousness all by itself.**

Sometimes our mind needs a little help to remember its true nature. We sit for a long time, but mind keeps thinking thoughts. In such a case, following the tricks below may help.

1) Remember that the mind cannot create any new thoughts. Every single thought is just an old thought, with some minor changes. When we realize this pointless repetition, we lose interest it those thoughts. Then, mind quickly merges into the consciousness.

2) Whatever the thought that is going on for a long time, analyze its contents in terms of the object of thought, the emotion, and the thinker. For example, if the thought is about a person, then that person is the object. Because of that person, there is some emotion like love, hate, etc. This emotion is happening to the thinker. When you have carefully analyzed these three, remember that they are false. The moment you remember that they are false, your mind will drop that thought and merge into the consciousness.

3) At some point, you really get tired and realize that you are suffering because of the thoughts. At that point, remember that the consciousness that has become mind. So, tell yourself that if the consciousness really wants itself to suffer, let it suffer. At that moment, mind will stop the thought and merge itself into the consciousness.

Let us look at the story told by Saint Dnyaneshwar. It tells us about our pitiable condition when we do not remember “who we are” and yet continue to search. **The important point of the first story is it is better to remember than to search endlessly. The point of the second story is that there is a drastic change when we remember who we are.**

### Story: Man, Who Forgot Who He Was

Once upon a time, there was a man who used to forget who he was. Let’s call him Mr. Forgetful. His wife was having a tough time because of his habit of forgetting. She could not trust him to do any task in the household.

Once she was occupied with house work. She needed groceries from the market. So, she made a list and gave it to her husband. She told him to go to grocery shopping. All he needed to do was to hand over the list to the shop owner. The shop owner would pack the groceries for him. Then, he needed to come home, with the bag of groceries. The task was very simple.

Mr. Forgetful had a doubt – what if he forgets who he was in the market? How would he be able to he come home, if he did not even remember who he was?

His wife was annoyed by his question. So, she wrote his name on a paper in big letters. She punched a hole in that paper and passed a rope through it. Then, she tied that rope with the name tag around his neck. She told him, if he did not remember who he was, to ask anyone he met, and that person would know who he is by reading the nametag.

So, Mr. Forgetful went to the market. On that day, there was a snake charmer in the market. The snake charmer was displaying snakes to the crowd. People were excited to see those snakes. Mr. Forgetful saw the crowd. He became curious and went to see the snakes.

At that moment, one of the snakes escaped from the snake charmer’s bag. Noticing the free snake, the people panicked and started running. While running, someone pushed Mr. Forgetful and his name tag slipped.

Knowing that the name tag was important to him, Mr. Forgetful looked for his name tag on the street. He saw something that looked like a rope. So, he picked it up and tied to his neck. Unfortunately, it was the snake!

In this confusion, he forgot who he was. As per his instructions, he started asking people who he was. But, he had a snake tied to him. So, people got scared, shouted loudly back at him, and ran away. Mr. Forgetful became even more confused and scared. He was in a very pitiful condition.

Luckily, his wife heard the noise and came to market. She got the snake charmer to remove the snake from his neck. She told him who he was and took him home.

### Story: A Beggar Who Become a King

Once upon a time, there was a king. He had a young son. It was expected that after king’s death, his son, the prince, will become a king.

One day during his early childhood, the young prince committed a serious crime. The king could not overlook that crime. The king banished prince out of his kingdom forever. The king asked a faithful minister to remove the prince from the kingdom.

The minister was a wise man. Instead of banishing the prince out of the kingdom, he hid the prince as a day laborer in some farm within the kingdom. The minister kept on an eye on the prince from a distance.

Several years passed by. The young boy forgot that once he was a prince. He lived in a poor hut. He wore ragged clothes. He would steal, fight, and beg for a piece of bread. He actually became a beggar!

When the old king was on a death bed, he remembered his son. He changed his verdict about his son’s banishment and re-established his son as a prince. After issuing this verdict, the king passed away. The wise minister knew the whereabouts of the new king. He, along with entire cabinet, went to the farm where the prince was working as a day laborer.

At that time, the prince was begging for a piece of bread. The minister approached the prince and told him the news that his father had passed away and now he was the king!

At that instance, there was a great transformation in that beggar. He suddenly remembered that he was a prince, and not a beggar. Within a minute, his entire appearance changed. He threw away the bread that he begged for and his ragged clothes. They were of no value to him now.

To conclude the topic of Dharana, let us see the comparison the 8 steps of Yoga to climbing the mountain told by Saint Dnyaneshwar. First two steps of Yoga (Yama and Niyama) are like a trail at the base of mountain. Steps 3 (Asana) is like a climbing the slope of the mountain. Step 4 (Pranayama) is climbing a steep slope that leads to the top of mountain. Step 5 (Pratyahara) is like climbing the last slippery slope at the very top of the mountain. Step 6 (Dharana), on other hand, is like a walking on large paved pathway on the plateau of the mountain - very easy.

### Steps to Experience the Consciousness:

1. Next two steps are called Dhyana and Samadhi. Since my knowledge in this area is limited, I am giving the quotes from various sources. According to sage Patanjali, **experiencing one-ness is Dhyana.** It happens when the mind gets absorbed into the consciousness. However, it still has a form of body. When the consciousness drops the form of the body, it becomes formless (Universal Consciousness). Experiencing this Universal Consciousness is called Samadhi. **The experience of Universal Consciousness answers the question “who am I?”** Please see the “Can You Describe Universal Consciousness in Words?” for further details.

You may have noticed that in last two steps, we talked about the consciousness and not much about the energy. What is happening to energy in last two steps?

* Sage Patanjali says that when the three gunas of energy cease to transform into further transformations and they recede back into energy, at that time, pure consciousness becomes established in its true nature. (PSY 4.34).
* Shri Krishna tells us that when a person rises above the three gunas of energy within himself, he is freed from birth, old age, disease, death, and attains enlightenment” (Gita 14.20)
* Saint Dnyaneshwar says that the dissolution of one life-element created by energy into another life-element, in reverse order of their creation, until no elements are remaining is Yoga. We will discuss this statement later.

### Problem Solved:

Let us see if the process of Yoga solved all the problems it said it will solve.

1. **Consciousness side** - Initially, consciousness has forgotten its true nature, and it had become the mind. It wanted to know “who am I?” With the experience of Samadhi, this question is finally answered. The mind gets absorbed in the consciousness. The mind knows that it comes from the consciousness, remains active until the consciousness wants it to be active, and then merges back into the consciousness. As such, it does not have an independent existence. Our mind had accumulated a lot of thoughts, information, desires, dreams, knowledge, and much more. In fact, this accumulation is the foundation of our identity. However, the consciousness does not hold on to any of this accumulation. Hence, when mind is about to merge back into consciousness, it has to drop all of its accumulations. It becomes junk, and it is thrown away. However, there is a very large upside. Next time when the mind comes back, it is fresh, alive, and creative!

**Wait a second. We are going rather too fast.** When we come across sentences like “throw away contents of mind or empty the mind etc.”, it scares us. We worked very hard to accumulate those contents. They are precious to us. Letting them go is difficult for us. Hence, we are afraid that if we lose the accumulated contents of the mind, then what will we be? Our identity hangs on to them. And that is not all – behind the fear of losing the identity, there is a monumental and gut-wrenching fear of death. It is our biological survival instinct – there is absolutely no way to get around it.

Questions and dilemma’s like these are surely going to visit us at this stage. We have to discover and confront them. Neither sage Patanjali nor any other great person can answer them for us. It’s up to us to walk to the last line. **Only an experience of consciousness, where the mind does not exist, but you are there, will truly convince you that you can be without the mind and its contents.** We need not wait for the experience of Samadhi to learn this fact. Every day, we go to deep sleep. At that moment, there is no mind at all. Samadhi is like that state, except that in deep sleep, there is no awareness. In Samadhi, there is awareness.

Sage Patanjali used the word “chitta” to define all the accumulated contents of the mind. When energy passes through this accumulated contents of the mind, energy stirs up these contents. Like a whirlwind that floats up dust particles and creates shape in the sky, the energy floats up the accumulated content, and creates the thought/desire etc. which we call a vrutti. When whirlwind loses its force, the dust particle settles, and the shape in sky is vanishes. **Similarly, when we stop supplying energy to the accumulated contents (chitta), it automatically stops creating vrutti(s). When all the vrutti(s) stop, we witness the consciousness within us.** The moment the consciousness is visible, the mind drops all the contents (chitta) and merges back into the consciousness. Next time the mind comes back, it does not hold on to those contents of the mind. It knows that this content is endlessly repetitive, not the source of creativity, has no value and causes unnecessary pain. **This dispassion towards the mind and its contents is nirodhaH. Yoga is the process of achieving the dispassion towards the accumulated contents of the mind. Hence, sage Patanjali defined Yoga as** **YogaH chitta vrutti nirodhaH.**

1. **Energy side -** With the experience of consciousness, we no longer identify ourselves with ego/Ahamkar. Hence, the grip that ego/Ahamkar had on the energy is released. Earlier, ego/Ahamkar had locked up the energy at the base of the spine. Now, it is liberated. With it, large amount of energy is released. We have already prepared the body to channelize energy to the top of the head. There it mergers with consciousness, fueling further expansion of consciousness into vast and unbounded Universal Consciousness.
2. **Our side -** Finally, we come to reason we were doing Yoga. We wanted our mind to stop chattering so much and be quiet. We were stressed. We wanted our mind to be at peace. With the experience of consciousness, we realize we need not seek peace of mind - we discover that our true nature is peace!

### Post Union:

Samkhya tells us that the consciousness is like a lame man. It has the power of contemplation but not of action. Similarly, energy is like a blind man. It has the power of action, but it cannot contemplate. Just as the separation of blind man from lame man will happen after reaching to the desired spot, the separation of the energy and the consciousness will happen. The energy will cease to act. The consciousness will isolate.

Reader: Can you briefly explain main concepts of Samkhya that are used in Yoga?

### What Are the Main Concepts of Samkhya That Are Used in Yoga?

**Samkhya tells us the process, its steps, and components of how Universal Consciousness became the consciousness that we currently experience.** This process is a foundation on which Yoga rests. Let us review the main concepts quickly.

We have seen the nature of Universal Consciousness earlier in this book. Next, the Universal Consciousness wishes to know itself. It wishes to know “who am I?”

To know itself, it needs a form or a shape. To come up with a form or shape, the Universal Consciousness creates two parts within itself – the consciousness and the energy. 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 be a living soul.

**The Energy creates a space life-element within the universal consciousness. Thereafter, within the space life-element, the energy creates air, fire, water, and finally earth life-elements, in that sequence. Everything that the energy creates, has the quality of guna (Rajas, Tamas, and Sattva).** The energy and consciousness create a life form using the five life-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, when the consciousness wishes to see, the energy then creates eyes in the 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 it is separate from the rest of the world.**

**Thus, after becoming** **separate and conscious, the Universal Consciousness gets to “know” itself. In this way, the Universal Consciousness becomes our normal consciousness, and it is dominated by ego, mind, and its desires and thoughts.**

Reader: How does Yoga come into picture here?

Author: Yoga wants to achieve stillness of mind. It means to be without ego, mind, and its desires and thoughts. When mind becomes still, it becomes consciousness. By nature, the consciousness is inseparable. Hence, at a certain stage, you experience Universal Consciousness. To experience it is the goal of Yoga.

Reader: It looks like we begin with concept Universal Consciousness from Samkhya and end with experience of Universal Consciousness using Yoga.

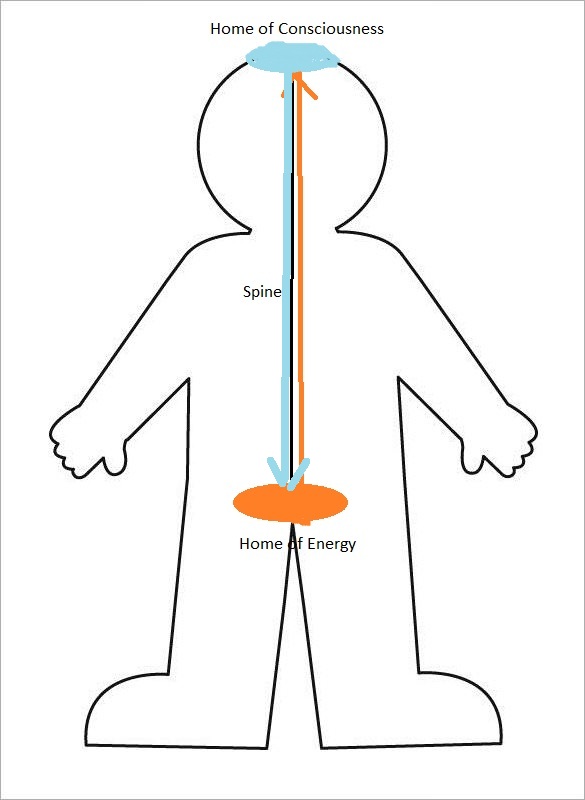
Author: Correct. This is the way we come to know “who am I?” It is very interesting to see that we have a wish to know “who am I?” and Universal Consciousness has a same wish.

Reader: Can you explain how the energy and consciousness work? Where did they come from into our body?

### Where the Energy and Consciousness Did Came from in Our Body? How They Work in Body?

As per Samkhya, the energy and the consciousness are the building blocks of the universe. Everything in world is made up from these two. And so is 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 unite itself to the consciousness.**

Reader: So 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.

Reader: It seems that there the energy is already active within us. There is already an energy flow happening within our body. In some way, body is already doing what Yoga is asking us to do. I find it confusing. Can you please explain the working of Energy and Consciousness in details?

### Can You Explain Working of Energy and Consciousness in Details?

Both the energy and the consciousness are always active within our body. The energy is moving up the spine, and the consciousness is coming down from the top of the head to the rest of the body. To sustain life, our body needs a small amount of energy and consciousness. **The energy moves up the spine without notice, and thus, brings the consciousness down.**

The consciousness is neutral and very hard to notice; the energy is vibrant and much natural to feel. Hence, in Yoga, we focus more on the energy; the consciousness is the result that we eventually get to see.

The energy and the consciousness are everywhere in the body; there is no cell of the body that does not have either of the two. The consciousness is like water and air – only when there is a contrast do you see the difference. We drink water, but it has no taste; we can differentiate it only when there is some flavor. We breathe air, but it has no smell; we can smell it only when there is some scent**. We can experience the calm and neutral feeling of the consciousness by contrasting it against the active, pulsating nature of the energy.** The more energy is available in the body, the more conscious you feel against the contrast of the vibrant energy.

**Yoga is a practice to release the energy additional to a normal level, move it across the spine, and then merge it into the consciousness.** In their merger, we witness the Universal Consciousness as it was before the separation. Please read the chapter about Universal Consciousness from this book to understand universal consciousness. As per one of Newton’s law, we cannot create energy nor destroy it. We can only convert it from one form to other. Similarly, in Yoga, energy can neither be created nor destroyed. We already have energy in our body, but we do need to make efforts to release it and we can only merge it into the consciousness.

In physics, an atom has a core with positive and neutral components. It also has a negatively charged electron, circling around the core at very high speeds. There is no concept of polarity in Yoga, and hence there are no positive and negative charges. Another difference is that the energy and the consciousness are inseparable and interdependent parts. **The consciousness is like the core of an atom except for the positive charge in it. It is always neutral and is the primary life sustaining force. The energy is like an electron except for the negative charge in it. It is always in motion and is attracted to the neutral consciousness.**

Just as the obstacles in the path of water block the flow of water, the obstacles in the path of the energy block the flow of the energy. The less the amount of water, the harder it is to break through the obstacles**. Similarly, the less the amount of energy, the harder it is to remove the obstacles.** The blocked water does not stay at the same location forever, but seeps through the ground slowly and continues its journey toward the ocean. **The energy too, does not stop when obstacles in its path reduce its flow; rather it leaks and continues to move up, even though less efficiently. The consciousness generated from this feeble supply of the energy is minuscule and not even noticeable.** It is a normal and common condition as there are significant blocks in the spine, which do not allow the energy to pass freely.

The higher consciousness, generated at the top of the head (Sahastrar), descends all over the body via direct and indirect paths. The spinal cord is its direct path to the Root Center, but there are other indirect paths as well.



The orange path is the path of the Energy as described by several books; the blue path is the path Consciousness took to find Energy.

**We need to be clear about two things about the energy. To succeed in Yoga, we need more energy than before, and we need to remove barriers in its path, so it can reach the top of the head.** However, we do not want a sudden rush of the energy; an abrupt removal of all barriers to the flow of the energy is not desirable. It can lead to a situation similar to the sudden opening of the floodgates of a dam, creating a flood-like situation in downstream communities. **Hence, we try to release the energy and remove the barriers in a “controlled” manner.** At this point, we meet Lord Ganesh, and we seek his help. The story of Lord Ganesh’s birth is a little strange, but with the above background, you will appreciate its message.

### Story: Lord Ganesh’s Birth

One day, while Goddess Parvati was going for her bath, she rubbed off the dirt from her body and out of it created the figure of a young boy. She infused life into this figure, told him he was her son, and instructed him to guard the entrance while she bathed.

Soon after, Lord Shiva came home, but the young boy blocked his way. Shiva became furious and fought the boy. Quite naturally, the young boy lost the battle to the god of warfare –Shiva – and had his head severed. Parvati, returning from her bath, saw her headless son. Anguished, she threatened to destroy the heavens and the earth.

The gods and Shiva pacified her. Shiva sent out his attendants to bring the head of the first living being sleeping with his head toward the north (the direction associated with wisdom). The first living creature they found sleeping with his head to the north was an elephant. They brought the head of this animal. Shiva placed it on the trunk of the young headless boy and breathed life into him. Parvati became overjoyed and embraced her son, the elephant-headed boy, whom Shiva named Ganesh, the lord of his special attendants.

### Interpretation of Story of Lord Ganesh’s Birth as Per Yoga:

Let us try to analyze this story using the lenses of Yoga, to see if we can find any message in it for us. Yogis depict the consciousness as Shiva and the energy as Parvati. The imagery of the energy and the consciousness as Parvati and Shiva is a way to represent their nature to make things easy to understand and remember.

Parvati wanted to take a bath while Shiva was away. Therefore, she needed someone to guard the home. She created a boy from mud or dirt on her body and put him in charge of guarding the door. **Make a note that she created an entire statue from the mud from her body, which means there must have been a good amount of it. It is not logical to have such a large amount of mud on the body.** Could it be that there is some a hidden message in this? **At the base of the spine lies the Muladhara Chakra, with Earth as its element.** **In the context of Ganesh’s story, the mud or dirt stands for earth, which indirectly refers to the Muladhar Chakra.** Parvati being at home and asking the boy to guard the door means that the energy is at the base of the spine, and there is no access to it.

When Shiva – Parvati’s husband – came home, the boy stopped him from entering his house. Shiva got angry and chopped off the boy’s head. Parvati came out from the bath and saw the headless, dead boy; in grief and panic, she lost control of her mind and was about to destroy the entire universe with her anger.

Please take a moment here to see the complete picture in terms of our body. It is important to understand the consequences of forced entry of the consciousness at the base of the spine. **The higher consciousness can force its entry into the home of the energy as it has the power to do so, and nothing can stop it. It means that all the locks that control the flow of the energy are suddenly open, and a large amount of the energy is released instantaneously.** Akin to a dam bursting and creating a flood in its path, this sudden release of the energy is not safe for the human body. The mind may lose control, the immune system may get whacked up, and the body parts may become dysfunctional. With body-mind damaged so much, even death seems a fair option.

As the story goes, Shiva implanted the head of an elephant on the boy’s body and restored life to him. He gave him the name Ganesh and gave him a mouse as his vehicle. **Ganesh’s primary role is to remove obstacles in the path of flow of the energy in a controlled manner.** It ensures the release of the appropriate amount of the energy for an individual.

**The higher the energy levels, the higher the amount of the energy that reaches the top of the head, where it merges with the consciousness. It creates a higher consciousness, which then comes down through the spine and the other body parts.** It is a cyclical process, since higher energy produces higher consciousness than before. Higher consciousness in turn fuels a greater amount of the energy. At this point, we meet Ganesh’s parents but not as separate entities. **They are dynamic, intertwined, co-dependent, indivisible processes that create and sustain life itself.**



**Once these processes are set in motion, they continue to go to higher levels at their pace. However, some body part becomes a bottleneck, and the energy and the consciousness cannot continue to go at higher levels. In that case, the processes stay at the same level**.

When the higher consciousness is available for the body parts and the cells, it has a medicine-like effect, and it rejuvenates the cells of the body. There is a saying in Yoga: You are as old as your spine. It says us a lot about the biological prowess of the spine.

**When we remove the blocks in the path of the energy, the energy merges with the consciousness. This merger gives rise to a higher the consciousness and provides us true knowledge. For this reason, we consider Ganesh as the god of knowledge.** He clears wrong perceptions and helps us to know one’s true nature. Removing blocks in the energy’s paths allows the energy to merge with the consciousness, and in that process, we gain knowledge about our true nature.

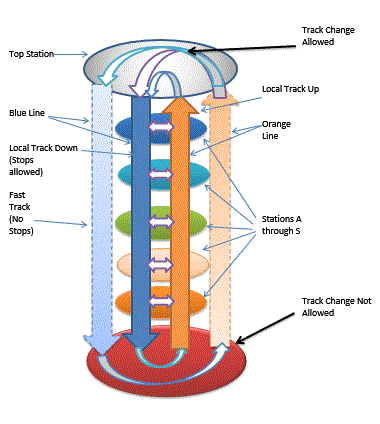
The place of Ganesh in our body is at the home of the energy that is, the Muladhar Chakra at the base of the spine. **Since the Muladhar Chakra is red in color, you will always see the color red associated with Ganesh.** Why does he have a tiny mouse for a vehicle? It is like using a small car engine to drive a big 16-wheeler truck; if it works, it will make it very slow. Why does he not drive something that matches his size and status?

**A little mouse as a vehicle indicates that he comes slowly, without any rush. Like all good things in life, real knowledge comes very slowly, with hard work and patience.**

**Reader: In that case, why I do not feel an energy operating within me?**

### Why I Do Not Feel the Energy Operating Within Me?

This concept is difficult to understand. Hence, let us take a rather unusual analogy to understand it.



Please review the above picture. It shows a railroad track connecting the Top Station to the Bottom Station and all the stations in-between. It has two tracks – a fast track and a local track. The fast track train goes from one end to the other without any stop. The local train stops at every station in-between.

When we go from the Top Station to the Bottom Station, we take the Blue Line. To come up to the Top Station, we take the Orange Line. We can choose the fast track or the local track at the Top Station only. The Bottom Station does not allow us to change the tracks. This as a limitation of this model.

When we are travelling, we did no see the stations A to S. We conclude that we are on the fast track. We want to see stations A to S. Hence, we need to be on the local track. But, our train will stop only at its last stop, the Bottom Station.

The only way to get to Station A, is to come back up to the Top Station via the fast track Orange Line and take the local track Blue Line again. At the Top Station, you can change to the local track and then take the Blue Line to Station A and other stations.

**By replacing the Top Station and the Bottom Station by the Sahastrar and the Muladhar chakra, we get the design of the human body**. The Blue Line represents the path of the consciousness, and the Orange Line represents the path of the energy. **The two tracks, fast and local, represent two different ways in which our body appears to us.**

The fast track represents a level of the energy and the consciousness, where we are not even aware of their existence and effects**. We keep circling up and down the two stations, as if we are on the fast track in the above model, never even knowing that there are stations in between.**

If we want to see the effects of higher energy and consciousness, we need to change the track to the local track. Such a track change can happen only at the Top Station or Sahastrar. **To make that track change, we need additional energy to flow to the Sahastrar. Yoga is one of the ways to achieve it.**

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

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

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. 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 level of consciousness. It is called as ‘Samadhi’. The word ‘Sama’ in Sanskrit means balance. **The highest state in Yoga is of ultimate balance!**

Reader: **Why we cannot find a Chakra in a dead body?**

### Why We Cannot Find A Chakra in a Dead Body?

**Any student of Yoga will benefit from the knowledge of Chakra or Centers.**

Each chakra has a specific way of converting energy in our body and expressing it to outside world. For example, Throat center of a person consumes the energy, and then the person becomes good orator or singer. Role of Yogi is to divert this energy to highest point possible – Sahastrar. Here the energy will merge into the consciousness and give an experience of higher Consciousness.

Reader: If the chakras exist in body, why we cannot find them, when we dissect a human body?

Author: **This question comes to every student when we first learn about chakras.** There are many similar questions. We do not find chakras when we dissect a body. Let me ask you a question – we experience various emotions like joy, love, happiness, hate etc. Can you find them when we dissect a dead body? These emotions are not like a physical body part like a hand. We “experience” these emotions. We experience them because of our consciousness. When there is no consciousness, which happens when a person is dead, these emotions cease to exist. Similarly, chakras do not exist in dead body.

Chakras are person-dependent, and they change over time. When looked from outside a person, they are aggregate of his emotions. When looked from inside a person, they are blockages in path of the energy.

Just as you need the consciousness to experience emotions, you need the consciousness to experience anything in Yoga and energy system. **In other words, you can experience the energy and chakras, only if you make conscious efforts to experience them.** Once you experience them, they will be as real as your hands. After this point, Yoga does not remain a daily exercise routine. It infiltrates in all aspects of your life. If a person does not make conscious efforts to experience them, for that person, energy, chakra, and rest of Yoga appear as a fiction or un-real things.

Reader: **Does chakras affect my practice of Yoga?**

### How Chakras Affect My Practice of Yoga?

Every person is different. A person needs to know what kind of efforts and experience come naturally to him. **If he chooses correct practice, he will get better results.**

A person with dominant tamas guna, which makes a person overeat or oversleep, is likely to succeed in the first two chakras, namely Muladhara and Swadhisthana Chakras. Similarly, a person with dominant rajas guna, which makes a person very active, is naturally aligned with the Power and the Heart Chakras. For a person dominated by the satva guna, which tries to seek god, devotion to god is very easy.

A person with analytical abilities is likely to find that meditation, a Third Eye Center activity, works for him. A person, with driver or leadership qualities, may find a way using the Manipur Chakra/Power Center to be easier. Both analytical and driver types of persons see emotions as a weakness and try not to be influenced by them. Distancing themselves from emotions works for them, and it comes naturally to them, though their responses are different. An amiable person, who is emotional, may find that the way using the Heart Center is best suited for him. For an expressive person, who likes to use vocal faculties rather freely, the Throat Center activities are natural.

There are six chakras in our body. **For each one of us, two of the chakras are active, while the others are dormant.** The methods and techniques, that use our active chakras, feel natural. You can quickly find out your active chakras by classifying your thoughts with respect to the chakras. For example, thoughts of insecurity indicate active Muladhara Chakra.

Reader: I do not know what practice to will suite me best. How can I choose?

Author: In that case, you need to use trial and error method. Try out various types of Yoga and then choose.

Reader: **How can I experience in the energy and chakras?**

### How to Make Conscious Efforts to Experience Energy and Chakra?

There are three components of conscious efforts:

1. Yoga pose: Take a Yoga pose that you can hold for a long time. The easiest and best pose is Easy pose / Sukhasana. Although it is called as Easy pose, it is certainly not an easy posture for a body. **However, if you do many other poses, and then take this pose, you will find it very comforting pose. It balances the circulation of energy within body.**
2. Pranayama: Do breathing exercises until you feel that you are tired. Then, let go of controlled breathing and let breath fall to its natural rhythm. **This practice is similar to #1 process described above, applied to breath.**
3. Dharana: Generally, we do above two steps in a classroom setting. However, classroom setting is not ideal to learn Dharana. Hence, we should do Dharana, when we are completely alone. Here, we are focusing on two things.
   1. Breath: Focus on the breath. Let it be natural. Notice that it is getting deeper and shorter. If you do not feel breath or if you get lost in thoughts, exhale four or five times with force. Then, focus again. **Be gentle and non-judgmental in focusing on the breath.**
   2. Sensation in spine: **Keep your attention in spine alone, preferably, at the base of spine.** Observe any sensation in spine. If you do not feel any sensation in spine, put the Root lock. If you experience pain in spine, make spine straight.

Reader: What happens when I take conscious effort as stated above?

### What Happens When I Take Conscious Effort?

Our senses operate on outside world. For example, eyes look outside. When we close eyes, we can continue to visualize. Thus, even when outside stimuli are shut off, the mind can create stimuli and eye sense continues to work.

**During Dharana, we are shutting both outside and inside stimuli.** If a though comes, we ignore it gently, and focus on the breath. Focusing on the breath is process. It takes some time. We may have to repeat it many times. Thus, Dharana is a gradual and slow process.

**When the mind becomes quiet, senses also become quiet.** **You will actually experience energy moving across the spine.** It will go from the base of spine to the top of head, and then and you experience higher consciousness

Reader: How long do I have to take this effort to get results?

Author: You will get the results the moment you are truly focused on breath. It means you are not using any of the senses from outside and your mind is quiet. The implicit question is how long will I take to reach that state? Obviously, the answer depends upon you. In general, 1 hour per day for a month, without a break may be a reasonable time estimate.

Reader: Is it possible that I do not experience anything, event after following above steps?

Author: It is not possible. It has to come. **With this experience, you will know the most essential quality of Yoga practice.**

Reader: What is the most essential quality of Yoga practice?

### What Is the Most Essential Quality of Any Yoga Practice?

**The most essential quality of any Yoga practice is a focus on the energy within body. It will lead us to the consciousness.** This book explains why and how we focus on the energy.

Any Yoga practice that ignores the energy is a circus, not a Yoga. Similarly, any physical practice, which focuses on the energy, can potentially become Yoga.

**We can think of the energy as a bridge that connects our body from one side and to the consciousness on other side.** This bridge already exists in our body. Yoga is practice of strengthening this bridge.

Reader: Can you explain the concept of the energy in practical terms, not in theory?

Author: Let us do a quick experiment to understand key aspects of Yoga – energy and consciousness.

### Experiment: Find Energy and Consciousness

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.

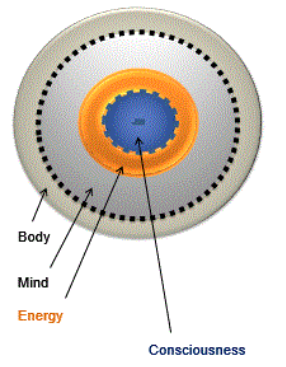
The breath, the beating of heart, movement of stomach etc. tells us that there are many “active” parts of our body. Our body is made of bones, blood etc., which are the “matter”. **Both matter and its activities belong to the energy.** Physics tell us that matter is made of energy and energy is always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

In general, we say body, mind, and spirit. Yoga splits the term ‘spirit’ into two terms as the energy and the consciousness. **By doing Yoga, we see them as a body-mind-energy-consciousness.**

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

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



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 an 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 the mind and the 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 the 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 the energy too.** Thus, the 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.

Reader: **Can you give us few tricks the experts will find useful to improve Yoga practice?**

### Can You Tell Few Trick to Improve Yoga Practice?

Let us look at different techniques that lead us to the goal of the Yoga practice – the consciousness.

**Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing):** The Sanskrit term “Shodhana” meaning cleaning. It means to clear the air passages of our breath. It helps to breathe to our full capacity.

**This technique is very useful when you are beginning or re-starting Yoga practice.** In these situations, we have a great inertia in the body to start doing Yoga or any other exercise. We would rather do a passive activity, like watching TV or over indulge in sense pleasures, like excessive eating. **These are indications that the body-mind is under influence of Tamas Guna - a mighty force of nature.** It will not let you start doing Yoga. It will make your intellect dull. There will not be any motivation. You will find many reasons not to do Yoga. **How can we overcome this great laziness and lethargy that has taken over us?**

The key to solve this problem is doing Alternate Nostril Breathing. If you have enough energy to change the TV channel, you can do Alternate Nostril Breathing. By following this technique, you can find out which nostril is blocked, or which nostril has less air flow. Once you know, gently try to increase the air flow from blocked nostril.

**Opening up nasal passages increased the air flow. It is the first step in starting Yoga.** For this purpose, there is a special technique, called as Neti. Its supplies are commonly available. Depending upon your capacity, you can also do “Bhastrika”, or Bellows Breath to increase the air flow. Once you make sure that you are breathing through both nostril to their full capacity, it will circulate Prana through the rest of the body. **You will get the required the energy to start moving, exercise, or Yoga.**

**Doing breathing techniques, to increase flow of Prana, is NOT the final answer to defeat the power of Tamas Guna. However, it will get you moving again!**

**Drishti (Gaze):** Every Yoga teacher tells his students to rest eyes on a spot during a specific pose. For example, while doing the Warrior 2 pose, teacher tells us that look forward over your middle finger. It certainly helps to align the neck position. In turn, it helps to set the third lock (Jalandhar bandha). But it does not help us become more conscious. So, let’s do a quick experiment to understand the term Drishti and how it helps us increase awareness.

Please look at the rectangle any rectangle. Try to see how your eyes and mind react to it. Typically, your eyes look first at one side and then the other side. You may notice the color of the borders. Your mind will try to find some specific details. It will attempt to categorize or label the shape into familiar shapes and figures. It may even say that this is foolish and a waste of time!

Please look at the rectangle again, with three additional conditions:

1. Look at all four sides of the rectangle at the same time.
2. Lock your eyes on the edges only.
3. Do not focus on the color or texture of the rectangle or the inside details or to the border.

Try looking at the rectangle with these three conditions fulfilled. Notice if there is any difference in your awareness. When our eyes focus on all four sides of a rectangle, and we do not focus on details, we are doing two things - **we are arresting the movement of the eyes, and we are stopping the mind’s tendency to break things into pieces.** When we prevent our eyes from moving, the energy we consume moving the eyes, becomes free. Likewise, when the mind does not analyze. It does not get lost in details and it makes the energy available. When we do not divert this energy into any other action or thought, it takes us to the consciousness. For this reason, we feel that we are becoming more and more conscious.

**This technique is very helpful in the Yoga poses. Once you learn this technique, you can practice easily during Yoga class. It will help you improve your balance as well.**

**Khechari Mudra:** When we are meditating in an Easy pose (Pranayama, Pratyahara and Dharana), the most common problem we face is the thirst. **Within 10-15 minutes of practice, and we start to feel very thirsty. Then, we have to get up to drink water.** If we drink a small quantity of water, we have to get up go to rest-room. All these activities break the flow of mediation.

Meditating requires that we lock in our body in one posture and do not move or make minor adjustments. With these breaks, we lose all the hard work we had done. To overcome this problem, Yoga has developed a trick. **All we need to do is to roll up our tongue as far as we can, without straining.**

Initially, it feels odd and even little painful. But over a period, it becomes easy and we get used to it. When tongue rolls up, it finds a soft pallet at the top of the mouth. From there, it finds opening in the nasal cavity, and practically stand up vertically. **At that time, the saliva from mouth naturally drips into throat. It keeps throat moist and we do not get thirsty. This saliva also acts as a source of food.** In addition, it creates an additional connection for an energy to go towards the top of the head. Interestingly, all Yoga books mention this technique. Yet, it remains the most powerful secret of Yoga.

**Shambhavi Mudra:** This is the last action a Yogi can take before he enters into Dhyana. It happens naturally too at certain stages, without taking any efforts. This action is just a suggestion or a reminder to a Yogi to make his transition into Dhyana easy.

Let us quickly review the steps that has happened, before we reach to this point. We did step 3 and 4, Asana and Pranayama. After that we sat in meditation and did step 5 and 6, Pratyahara and Dharana, where we turned our senses and mind inwards. At this point, we are naturally aware of the various sensations in body. We systematically move our attention from toes to every part of the body and finally to the head.

In this process, we encounter different type of sensations. Some sensations are painful. They appear as a continuous long plate, like entire leg or arm appears to have one single pain sensation. It is a sensation of Earth life-element. As per Yoga, Earth life-element dissolves into Water life-element. When you watch that sensation long enough, it will change into Water or Fire or Air life-element sensation. A Fire life-element sensation has hot or cold type of sensation. A Fire life-element dissolves into Air life-element, which has consciousness minute vibrations type sensation. Even those sensations dissolve into Space life element sensation, which really has no sensation. It feels like a void enclosed in a body type of sensation. Sooner or later, even this sensation too dissolves.

**Every sensation has two parts. One part is made of energy, which has five life-elements sequence we saw above. The other part is the consciousness.** As the life-element sensations dissolve, the consciousness become fine grained. Earlier an entire arm has one sensation of pain, now has numerous sensations of various kinds.

**As this process continues and the sensations vanish, the consciousness particle associated with that sensation is released. It naturally travels towards the head.** Initially, you will feel the sensations in the forehead. When the upward flow becomes steady, you will feel it at the top of the head – Sahastrar. Shambhavi Mudra is being aware of the sensation that develops, initially in forehead, and later at the top of the head. It accelerates the process and it is the last bodily sensation that you will feel.

Reader: **Can you explain the merging of life-elements and merging of energy into the consciousness?**

### How the Life-Elements Merge Into Each Other and How the Energy Merges into The Consciousness?

Before we discuss this topic, we need to understand how the energy and consciousness created the world that we experience within us. Please read the topic – “What Are the Main Concepts of Samkhya That Are Used in Yoga?” to get a quick review of the creation process. It is important to understand this process. **Yoga’s ultimate goal is to reverse this process!**

We did not discuss the Chakra or the Energy Centers in Creation process. So, let us quickly recap them as we experience them in the path of energy in our body.

* The home of the energy in our body is the Muladhara Chakra or the Root Center. It has Earth as its life-element. During the Creation, the energy created the Earth life-element as the fifth and the last element.
* Before that, the energy created Water as the fourth life-element. It is a life-element of the Swadhisthana Chakra or Enjoyment Center in our body.
* Before that, the energy created Fire as the third life-element. It is the life-element of the Manipur Chakra or the Power Center.
* Before that, the energy created Air as the second life-element. It is the life-element of the Anahata Chakra or the Heart Center.
* At first, the energy created Space as the first life-element. It is the life-element of the Vishuddha Chakra or the Throat Center.

Now that we understand the main concepts, let us look how the energy merges into the consciousness. Of course, the process described below happens in a highly advanced Yogi. Yet, it gives a glance into working of final stages in the practice of Yoga. Let us see how that happens in a highly advanced Yogi, who is about to realize this ultimate goal of Yoga.

* In highly advanced Yogi, when the energy begins its final ascend from Root Center towards the top of head, it leaves Root Center for good. Once it has left Root Center, it will never come back here again. Thus, this Yogi will never experience any of the ego/Ahamkar and its insecurities ever again. At that instance, energy takes contents of the Earth life-element with it to the next center, which is Swadhisthana Center.
* Swadhisthana Center has Water as its life-element. It dissolves the contents of Earth life-element into itself. So, in the process of de-creation, the last created life-element vanishes into one created before. Hence, it is important to remember their sequence.
* When energy moves to Manipur Center, it takes contents of the Water life-element with it. Manipur Center has Fire as its life-element, which consumes the contents of the Water life-element.
* From there, energy goes to Anahata Center or Heart Center, which has Air as its life-element. Here energy dissolves the Fire life-element in the Air life-element.
* Finally, energy moves to Throat Center. The Throat Center has Space as its life-element, which consumes the Air life-element of Heart Center. At this stage, energy has dissolved Air life-element into Space life-element, and only Spaces life-element remains. At this instance, the energy is essentially an energetic Space life-element. Yogis identified this special state with a name as “Marut.” At Throat center, the Space life-element finally dissolves the Air life-element from Heart Center.
* From Throat Center, the energy moves to Third Eye Center It is the center of intuition, knowledge, concepts, and creativity. Normally, the energy powers all these activities. But for an advanced Yogi, the energy leaves even the Third Eye Center as-well. There will not be any visions, intuitions, concepts, knowledge, thoughts, desires and rationalizing intellect for this Yogi.
* From Third Eye Center, the energy moves to the Sahastrar. It is the home of the consciousness. At this time, the energy has dissolved everything in its path. The experience of ego or I also merge back into consciousness. Now, it exists as pure energy and it readily merges into the consciousness. The consciousness expands infinitely and becomes the universal consciousness. This Yogi is never coming back to the normal life again!

Reader: It sounds like whatever is being done in the process of creation is being un-done by Yoga using the de-creation. It also sounds like this creation given in Yoga is no way related to the Creation theory discussed in Science. Am I correct?

Author: Yes. According to Science, the world was created by a Big Bang 13 billion years ago. Yoga does not make a claim to explain any such event or process.

**For Yoga, the goal of the creation process is to understand various components and their interactions within us. Yoga is not concerned with anything outside of our existence.** Unlike scientists, yogis are not too interested in their theory of creation either. Their focus is on the process of de-creation. The only reason Yoga discusses the creation is to help us understand the process of de-creation and experience it within us. With such an experience, Yogis wish to witness this world as unreal within themselves. They do not mention anything about the external world.

Reader: To certain extent, both creation and de-creation sound unbelievable. I have so many doubts and question. How will I get their answers? **Are we supposed to believe and accept these theories “as-is”?**

### Are We Supposed to Believe and Accept the Theory “As-Is”?

**No. Yogis do not ask you to believe in any answers, given by anyone, be a great guru or a scripture.** They know that the true knowledge comes with real experience. Our job is to strive for experience. Once we get the experience, we “test” the scripture by comparing our experience with them.

**The questions and doubts are natural part of the process of learning. They are most welcome, as long as the person is ready to “test” the Yoga.** Sometimes, people ask questions for sake of questioning. There is no way to give satisfactory answers to those questions. These questions originate from a certain level of spiritual intelligence. Until that level changes, those questions do not go away. A person may think that he is asking a different question, but the answer does not satisfy him, and the next question arises in his mind. **Yogis try to avoid the endless question-answer game. They encourage us to experience the reality within us.**

When we are learning about these concepts, we need to understand that Yoga is describing the states of existence beyond all the concepts. However, the Yogis try to explain that state, the words come out to be wrong, misleading, and incomplete.

Let us take a simple example. If we are given a spoon and asked to measure the quantity of water in a glass, we can tell the answer. Here the spoon is the tool we used to do the job. Next, if we are asked to measure the amount of water in the ocean with that spoon, we cannot do it. **Similarly, the concepts that we use to understand any process are tools of our language. However, these they are completely useless in expressing the states of existence beyond all the concepts.** So, as a reader of the scripture and listener of words of a guru, we need to keep in mind this limitation of the concepts expressed in words. We should not get stuck on words, concepts, or an expression, but strive to get an experience.

Once we get even a rudimentary experience, we will try to understand it using the concepts mentioned in scripture. We will see that the scripture expresses same sentiments about the experience and they express it very eloquently! **The experience and understanding its meaning through the scriptures will change the level of spiritual intelligence, and eventually, all our doubts will fade away.**

Reader: Between an experience and the knowledge, what is most preferable?

Author: To strive for an experience needs to be a priority. Without it, all the knowledge is useless and harmful as well.

Reader: How will I know that that the experience I had is related to the Yoga, and not something else?

Author: People consume chemical substances or liquids like drugs and alcohol etc. They do experience something. But, that experience is no way related to Yoga. Goal of Yoga is to take you to the natural state of pure observer. We call it as the consciousness. **You will know that it is an experience related to Yoga because it changes your level of consciousness, at least for some time.** It puts a break on thoughts and mind stops for a moment. You are aware. It is a highly peaceful moment – one that you had experienced sometimes before. You will recognize it to be so.

Sometimes, people may even discard such an experience as a hallucination or a dream. They completely ignore it and move on with their daily life as if nothing has happened. To avoid such a tragic loss, it helps to be with a Guru or read some scriptures.

Reader: **What is the role of guru in Yoga? What is the difference between a guru and a teacher?**

### What Is the Role of Guru in Yoga?

Let us take a simple analogy. Imagine that you are going on a mountain trek, where the trail is not clear and safe. It happens to be a dark night. You had forgotten troche or any other any source of light. With some element of luck, a traveler come across and lends you a fire to ignite a small lantern. Then, the traveler walked away. Now, you can continue to climb on your own.

The traveler, who lends you fire to ignite your lantern, is a guru. Without a guru, there would be no fire to light the lantern with. The eastern cultures give immense importance to guru. Only he can lift the veil of darkness. **The word "gu" means darkness and "ru" means one who drives away. Thus, guru is a person who drives darkness away.**

A guru need not do anything else, like hold your hand, or walk a few steps with you. The eastern cultures have seen many gurus, who did not spend any time with a disciple or did not teach anything to the disciple. Nevertheless, the disciple learned a lot from the guru and achieved the highest state of consciousness because of the guru.

Reader: What is the difference between a guru and a teacher?

Author: **There is no parallel concept of a guru in the western cultures.** We do however, hear of the stock market gurus, interior design gurus, etc. The use of the word guru as a synonym of expert is wrong. An expert is a teacher, not a guru.

A teacher teaches new things. But, he always relies on the logical capabilities of the student. Theoretically, a student can learn the same thing all by himself, only it would take a long time. There is always some form of fees or barter for teacher’s services.

A guru brings in a whole new quality or dimension to his disciple. It is something that a disciple cannot even imagine or acquire by himself. A guru stands beyond all means and ways his disciples can repay him in any form. Except his sincere desire to change himself, the disciple cannot bring anything else to a guru. A disciple does bring unwanted chaos with him, but the guru manages to establish order within the disciple.

Reader: Is there any difference between a disciple and a student?

Author: Just as there is a difference between a teacher and a guru, there is a difference between a student and a disciple. **A student is looking to gain something, like knowledge, but a disciple is looking to lose something –his ignorance.**

Interestingly, a guru may initially play the role of the teacher, as he knows that students are curious. The guru uses this curiosity as a tool to transform the student into a disciple. It is the compassion of a guru, which makes him come down from an unimaginable higher level to the level of the disciple. Do not be attached to his logical assertions, because he intends to use them to take the disciple to somewhere beyond logic.

Reader: **Is Yoga a modern innovation? Is it an ancient practice?**

### Is Yoga a Modern Innovation or an Ancient Practice?

Any society and culture evolve over time. With that change, their spiritual practices also evolve. An ancient society like India had gone through several of changes in its spiritual practices. **With it, Yoga as a spiritual practice also evolved.**

Partly due to western interest in Yoga, Indian culture re-invented the Yoga in a new form. Hence, some experts argue that Yoga is a recent, less than 100 years old, innovation. They are wrong. Let us see few reasons.

Indians have been practicing Yoga for centuries. **There were many different types of Yoga.** **Hence, Sage Patanjali had to develop a system, with eight steps, to find out most common elements amongst those practices.** He lived almost 2000 years ago. Gita, written before 2500 years, has many verses related to Yoga. History of Yoga cannot be complete without mentioning Nath sect. They pushed Yoga to new heights and have left detailed written accounts. Seeing Ramayana as a way to explain Yoga proves that Yoga has been around over 3700 years!

There is a difference between the Yoga that we practice today and the way it was practiced in old days. Today, we do many poses in a series, within an hour in a classroom setting. **The long sequencing of poses like Sun Salutations is certainly a modern innovation.** It suites our modern lifestyle and give us a good physical workout.

In olden days, a yoga student would go to a guru. A guru may test him and then admit him as his disciple. Student would stay with guru with small number of other students. Guru would observe this new student. Then, guru would give him a one pose or short sequence (Kriya) to practice. The student would practice that pose (or Kriya) for years! It would lead him to experience of Samadhi.

**If you ignore the differences in way Yoga is practiced, you will see that the poses and the knowledge about them existed for a very long time.** Therefore, Yoga as a spiritual practice with physical poses and breathing is not a modern innovation.

Reader: **Is mass marketing of Yoga wrong or bad for the Yoga?**

Author: **Swami Vivekananda gave the Yoga as a gift to the humanity. Everyone is free to use Yoga as they think fit.** Yoga has spread all over the world. Now, it is freely available to everyone. As we saw, Yoga has evolved over 3000+ years. The mass marketing is a new phase is evolution of Yoga. Evolution is always messy. It will add new features and it will remove some feature. We see that the strict guru-disciple chain is disappearing. Today, we learn Yoga from internet! And the Sun Salutations are a relatively new and welcome addition to Yoga.

**In spite of all these changes, the essential quality of Yoga, which is to focus on energy, has remained intact.** Therefore, Yoga is intact and mass marketing has done no harm to Yoga. Be assured that Yoga will not come to harm because of some market savvy sellers. For the same reason, it does not need to be protected from anyone.

Reader: The concept of evolution of Yoga is very interesting. I wonder how Yoga will evolve in future. **Will the western world accept Yoga as it was done in India long time ago?**

### Will the Western World Accept Yoga as It Was in India Long Time Ago?

No. As we discussed, **Yoga has and will continue evolve.** We know that the evolution does not go backwards! It would be childish to assume that western cultures will practice Yoga the way Indians practiced centuries ago. Let us imagine a Yogi, who lived few thousand years ago and then compare him to the modern Yogi.

**Few thousand years ago, a Yogi would most likely be middle-aged man. His goal is to be in the state of Samadhi.** He is ready do anything to meet his goal. He left his family, household, and duties, so that he can focus on his goal. He became a disciple of a guru. He does what his guru tells him to do. He travels from place to place with guru and his other disciples. He does not care about his outer appearance. The value of his entire possessions, like clothes etc. is less that the cost of one meal. He even begs for food. **Yoga is one of the tools he is using to achieve his goal.**

Now let us look a modern Yogi. Today’s Yoga classes, everywhere in world, are dominated by females. **Hence, our new Yogi is most likely be a young woman.** Probably, she is married and have kids. In addition, she has a career. We can be certain that she does want not to become anything like the ancient Yogi. On the contrary, she has established herself firmly in the world. She wants to launch herself ever higher**! Yoga is one of the tools she is using to achieve her goal.**

We see that the modern and ancient Yogis are truly world apart**. It is a miracle that their paths came so close to each other due to Yoga!** Let us take a simple analogy of two people are driving in their respective cars in an opposite direction. Obviously, their goals, directions, and destination are different. But, the vehicle they use are similar. Similarly, ancient and modern Yogis are different in their goals**.** But, the vehicles they use are similar to each other. **They use Yoga as a vehicle to reach their destination.**

Reader: **How are the modern and ancient Yogis similar to each other?**

### How an Ancient and The Modern Yogis Are Similar to Each Other?

Clearly, they share their love towards Yoga. We know that Yoga is not an isolated process, but it integrates all aspects of life. As such, it becomes a way of life. Sooner or later, Yoga changes the values of a person. **A best way to know a person is to understand his values.**

Value is a vague word, so let us understand concept of a value. **These values determine what a person should do, what he should not do.** Similarly, values determine what a person expects others to do and not to do. These are codes of ethics. Values emerge from questions like: What are my rights and responsibilities? What are my duties? What are my limitations? What is acceptable behavior and what is unacceptable? What is good for me? Is it also good for the society in general? The answers to questions like these become our values. **The values do change, but they do so very slowly.**

Now, let is look at some of the core values that a Yogi, both ancient and modern, has or aspire to have.

1. **Equality of All Life:** We saw that there is one indivisible, Universal Consciousness. Thus, all living beings, including not just humans, but also birds, animals, trees, and other creatures, have the same consciousness within themselves. **This value creates an inherent equality of all living beings.** A Yogi will not take away this right to equality from all life forms, it at any cost.
2. **Male-Female Equality:** We saw the importance of the energy in Yoga. With energy as a creative and feminine principle at its core, a Yogi cannot possibly imagine women as inferior**. In some way, the focus on the energy in Yoga ensures the equality of men and women.** Due to ability of females to give birth, the Yogis regards females little higher than men. **A curious observation on this point is that all male Yogis have embraced their feminine side – softness, love, and creativity.** Even in Mythology, name of female goddess comes before male god. For example – Sita Ram and Radha Krishna.
3. **Rejection of All Beliefs and Concepts:** Sage Patanjali clearly stated that the natural state of pure observer, the consciousness, is beyond the mind. Therefore, a Yogi has to go beyond his mind. He can do so, only if he rejects all his thoughts, beliefs, and concepts. Even the concept of God or No-God, or the concept of consciousness, are just the concepts. They all are all mere mental formulations. Hence, they were of no use to a Yogi. They need to be discarded. **A Yogi clearly understands that the mind has its limitations.** This rejection of all beliefs and concepts is truly uncommon and it makes a Yogi stand out. **In short, Yogi’s do not believe in any beliefs!**
4. **Not Doing – Just Happening:** Rejection of all beliefs and concepts lead a Yogi to the significant value of doing vs. happening. To do something, one needs an idea, concept, thought, or a belief. Without that direction, what can a person do? But, for a Yogi, when he did, perform, or act on something, he became a doer. It makes the ego unavoidable. **Anything, which came with the ego, Yogis consider it as wrong.** The only other option is to be open and “let it happen” - whatever “it” may be. When things happen to someone, they cannot claim the ownership of those actions. Thus, a Yogi avoids being the doer and the ego that comes from owning an action. **Hence, being a Yogi is about being in a state of concept-less, belief-less, fearless, expectation-less, open, and waiting.**
5. **Free Expression as a Cleansing Process:** The “Just Happening” state takes a Yogi to a strange place, where he let go of the self-control that we normally exercise on ourselves. **He allows his body-mind to behave freely and express it the way it wants. This process releases the energy and allows the energy to flow toward the Sahastrar. Thus, it becomes a cleansing process for a Yogi.** It is called as Kriya. It is an individual’s spontaneous and uninhibited behavior. For that reason, it has many forms. The practice of Kriya creates certain risks. Therefore, it needs complete solitude, or it must be done under the guidance of a guru. While doing a Kriya, a person is aware of his actions. If required, the person can snap himself out from Kriya.
6. **Actions Are Done for Actions Sake, Not for Results:** **A Yogi takes an action for its sake. He does not act to get the results.** The results do follow, but for them, the action does not connect to the result. This value is very different from other people. For most people, the actions and their results are directly connected. In fact, they first decide the results they want, and then perform the actions to get the desired results. If there were no chance of getting a result, they would not think of performing even a small action. A Yogi does not think that way.
7. **Rejection of Fate:** **Yogi’s reject fate.** They know that a person performing an action will get the results of the action in due course and that fate has nothing to do with it. It is a general misconception about a Yogi that they believe in fate or they have a fatalistic view.
8. **Highly Active:** **A Yogi is a very active individual.** None of these great Yogi ever behaved like a vegetable - doing nothing and giving up everything in the name of fate.

After reading these values, we can see that both modern and ancient Yogis follow or aspire to follow the same value system. There are some differences too. Ancient Yogis believed in re-incarnation or caste system, but modern Yogi does not think about them.

Reader: I see that I do have some of the values you listed above. However, I do not have the many of other values. I did not understand them, and I do not practice them for sure. They may even conflict with my current value system.

Author: Yoga is a way of life. Even if we do not have these values at this moment, sooner or later, Yoga will change you and your values will become similar to ancient Yogis!

**Reader: How can I get answers to my questions? Who will help me?**

### How Can I Get Answers to My Questions? Who Will Help Me?

When we get deeper into Yoga, various kinds of questions arise. **The answers to such questions hide deep inside us. All we need to do, is to ask.** Do not be satisfied with what comes to you quickly and easily from your memory. Stay with the question for some more time, until it reveals the answer by itself. You may get the answer that you have not even imagined or expected before. It is surprising to see that answers are known deep inside us and come out when we are least expecting them. **The more authentic your question is, the more relevant the answer is going to be to your nature.**

Think about these questions as a fishing gear, drop it in a lake, and have patience. Fishes already exist in the lake; they will show up, as it is their nature to come. To get “your” fish, you will need “your” fishing gear; someone else’s gear will not help. You may borrow a gear from someone, but it is certainly not “your” fish, as the equipment belongs to someone else.

Questions and their answers, which belong to someone else, will help only so much. **The real fun is in asking the question and waiting - waiting for it to reveal the answer.** The answers which come out from this process, will not be theoretical or philosophical answers. Since they come out of your nature, they have actual relevance to you.

Think about these questions as secret messages sent your way. Not just one, but hundreds are sent in your name. Once you get a question and its answer, it establishes a link between you and the sender. **The sender will know that you are interested in Him (Universal Consciousness), and He will begin His advance toward you, with a faint smile, without a moment in-between. Sage Patanjali called him “Ever-present Guru”. He has many names and you can call Him whatever you want. His only requirement is you ask “your” question and not run away with a secondhand answer.**

A U M

Isavasya Upanishad

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात् पूर्णमुदच्यते ।   
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥   
ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः ॥

om pūrṇamadaḥ, pūrṇamidam, pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyatepūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate Om shaantih shaantih shaantih

pūrṇam: Full, Complete, Infinite, Perfect, Consciousness, Self, Lord, Supreme, Bramha, Vishnu, Shiva

adaḥ and idam: THAT and THIS. Our sense organs define this line. Anything beyond the limits of sense organs is THAT. Anything within the bounds of sense organs is THIS.

Other Translations:

That is Full. This is Full. From that Full, this Full has come.

When this Full is taken from that Full, it always remains Full! Om Peace, Peace, Peace!

My Translation:

THAT (universe) is conscious. THIS (within me) is conscious.

Consciousness (within me) came from Consciousness (of the universe)

When Consciousness is separated from Consciousness, the Consciousness remains the same. Om Peace, Peace, Peace!

Background: Isavasya is the topmost Upanishad. It begins with this line. Mahatma Gandhi said “If all other scriptures be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Isavasya were survives, nothing is lost”

Implications:

that which has come from the Infinite is also Infinite

I would like to draw your attention to very first verse of Ishavasya Upanishad. It is one of the most important scripture. The verse says - तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ॥ I translate this verse as “The great ones renounce their wealth and then enjoyed it. Do not covet anyone else’s wealth”.

Your question is “acquiring and spending money? Do we donate more and save less?”. The above verse gives guidance of scripture: YES to all of above as long as you do not attach yourself to it. Needless to say, it is much easier to say and very hard to practice!

In case you are interested, there is a Goddess of Wealth called as Laxmi. She is wife of Lord Vishnu. There is a large body of knowledge which deals with what is wealth and how to use it. May be, someone can point you in that direction.

Hope this helps.