

Embodiment Through Yoga – Implications for Personal Awareness and Relation to the World



Samvidyoga w/Lea Loncar/ 2018 Arctic Yoga Conference

Summary

Mechanical vs phenomenological world view: shapes our (level of) experience and awareness

Through body, we know

Everything is connected. Healing is self-organised

Manifold dependencies and complex mutual influences of human-environment system

Yoga- impetus for a process, rather than a fix

Yoga works indirectly and leads to unique experiences & changes

Creating microhabits

Cultivating – removing obstacles

Radical transformation implies shift in bodily experience

Tapas- No pain no gain.

Pratyahara – when the world turns inward

Novelty of meaning

Transformation leads to (unintentional) action.

Phenomenology Embodiment Healing
Tensegrity Microhabit Tapas Pratyahara
Meaning creation Transformation (Non)-
intentional action



Mechanical World View

From the late Middle Ages till today, people have always believed that every yoga exercise has a defined effect.

Present in science: Focus on questions of *outcome*, i.e. what are the measurable *effects* of yoga practices?

Reinforced by Hatha-yoga combined with western (Swedish) gymnastics (modern dynamic yoga).

Focus on yoga poses and its benefits (biomechanics of yoga).

Translated into a broader (spiritual) context.



Discourses Present in Mainstream Practices Today

- “Neck exercises”
- “Twists cleanse your liver”
- “Headstand is good for your hormones”
- “Muladhara chakra for releasing fears”
- “Yoga can fix you”

Phenomenological Perspective

Embodied Knowledge

Phenomenological perspective:

The primacy of the body in knowledge constitution (Merleau-Ponty, 1963; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Merleau-Ponty (1967)

The body (or *lived body*) is as a pre-linguistic subject that co-constitutes meaning.

Prior to thought and representation, there is a primordial coexistence between the body and the world which grounds the possibility of developing conscious awareness and knowledge (Burkitt, 1999).



The body is the natural Self. Every change in the body leads to a change in how we experience world.

Embodied Knowledge

From the body (sensation) to ideas and meanings and back.

fb/the idealist



Never hold your farts in.

They travel up your
spine, into your brain
and that's where
shitty ideas come from.

Exploring Yoga Embodiment

“Because yoga allows me to become more aware of how I move, balance, breathe, and feel within my body, it helps me to experience embodied presence. When I am more present in my body, I feel things more deeply. The emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations that come up during yoga practice can be difficult at times, but there is also a sense of aliveness as the powerful energy that flows through me is loosened and recognized.”

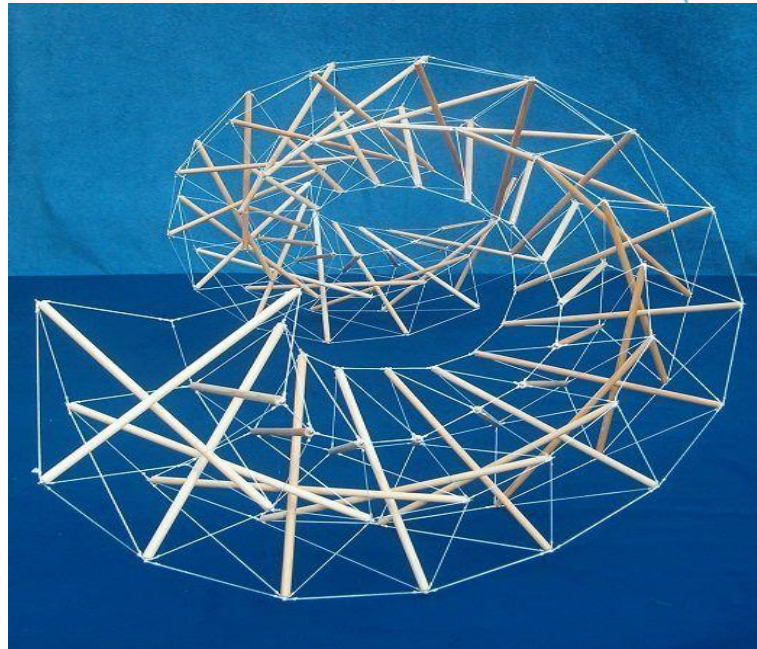
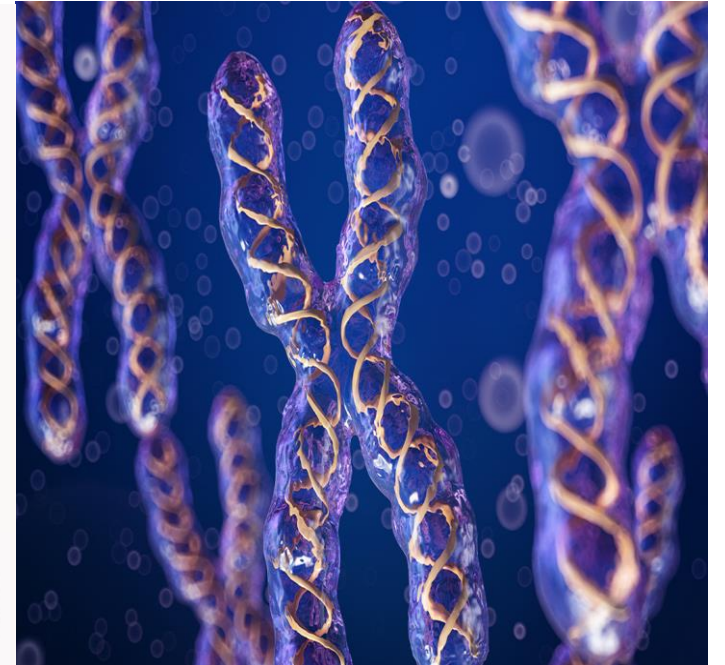
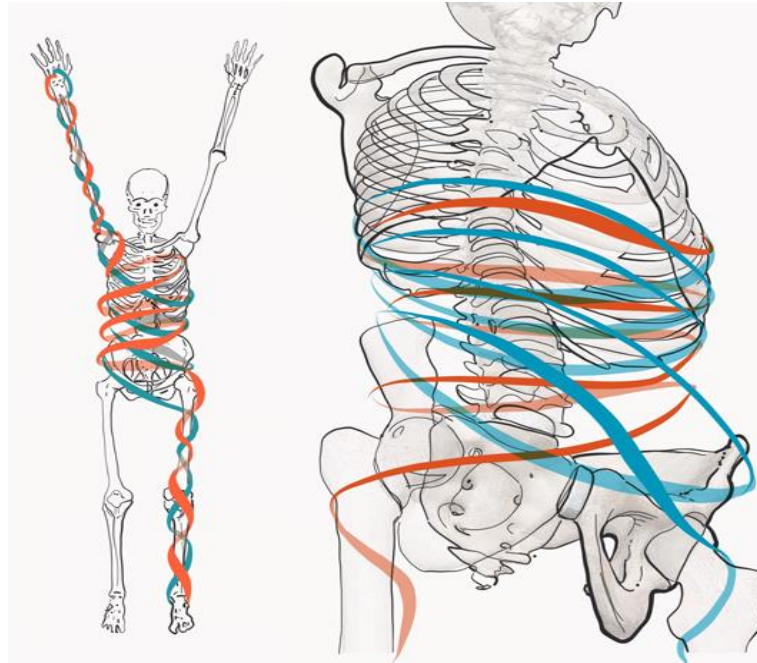
(Yoga student)



Tensegrity - Underlying Structure of Gentle Awareness

Practicing yoga reminds us of the following important facts:

- The quality of movement (achieving maximum effect with minimum effort).
- Non-force as an optimal approach to yoga-states.
- Interconnectedness of all living beings.
- The yoga experience initiates a whole range of internal/external changes.
- The yoga experience is an experience of equilibrium, lightness and unified field of consciousness.
- The yoga experience is an experience of transformation.



SNS & PNS

Your autonomic nervous system (ANS) coordinates cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, urinary, and reproductive functions. It constantly monitors and adjust internal water, nutrient and gas balance - and does so without instructions or interference of the conscious mind. The ANS is concerned with maintaining homeostasis within your body. It contains two primary divisions (SNS and PNS) that work in opposition - whenever one is being activated, another one is being suppressed.



SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM (SNS) - THE ACCELERATOR



SNS is concerned with increasing alertness, metabolic rate, and muscular abilities. When sympathetic activation occurs, you will experience:

- Increased alertness
- A feeling of energy and euphoria
- Elevated blood pressure, heart and breathing rate
- A general elevation in muscle tone
- The mobilization of energy reserves



PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM (PNS) - THE BRAKE

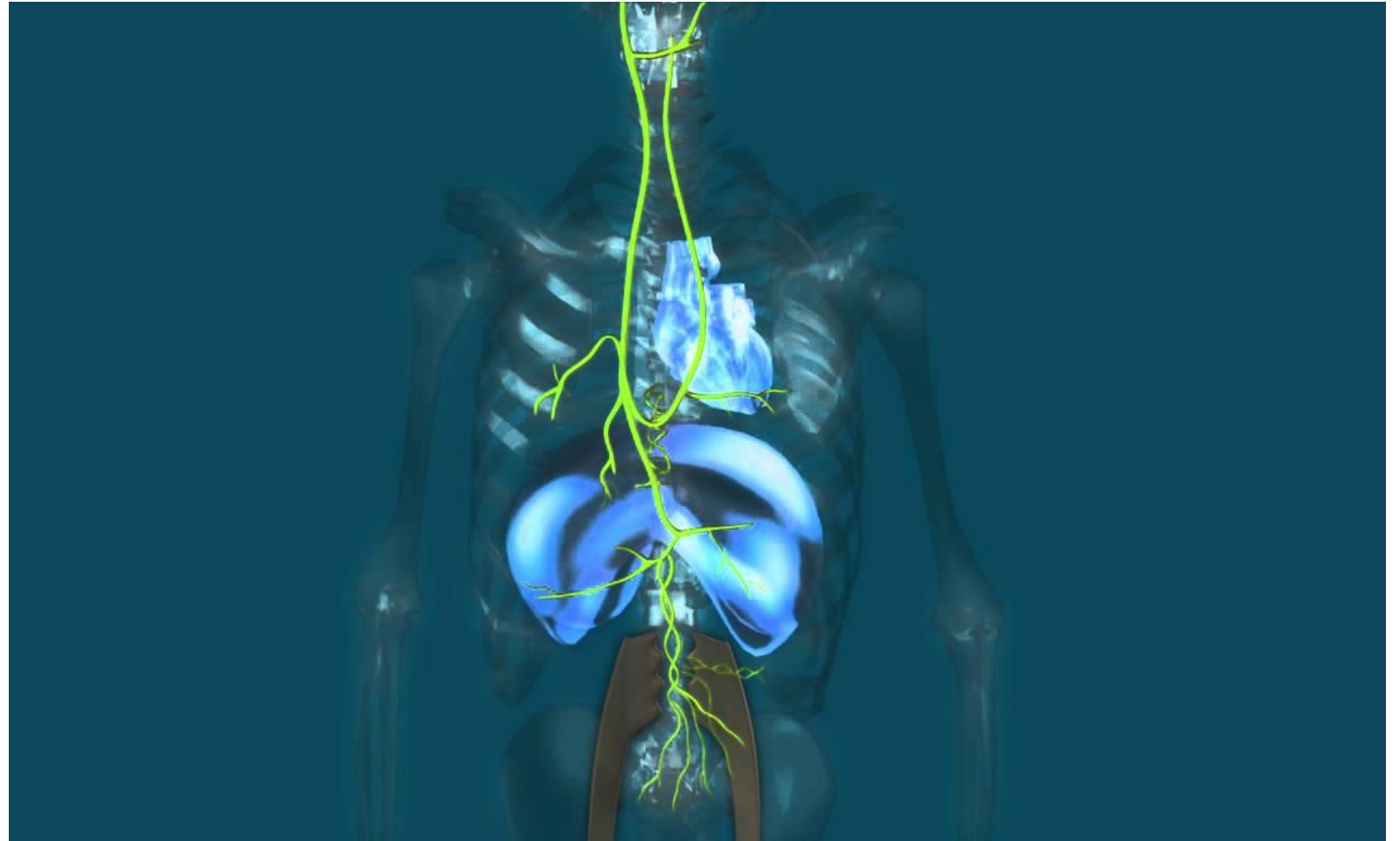


PNS is concerned with relaxation, food processing and creating energy reserves. When parasympathetic activation occurs, you will experience:

- Decrease in alertness
- A feeling of calmness and relaxation
- Increase in metabolic rate
- Reduction in heart rate and force of contraction
- Increase in digestive activity

The Primacy of Meditativeness in Yoga Practices

- Embodying peace
- Improving self-regulation (top down and bottom up via vagal tone).
- Promoting self-regulation on mental and bodily levels.



Switch Towards Parasympathetic Response

Shift from the more reactive sympathetic branch (fight, flight or freeze) to the calmer parasympathetic branch (rest and digest) of your background operating system.

Relaxation lowers levels of substances linked to inflammation (health of CNS, & immune system).



Yoga and meditation reduces anxiety, depression.
Yoga and meditation increases mindfulness.

Healing is Self-organised

Characteristics of healing:

Complex, interdependant process.

Constant adaptation, flexibility and change.

Self-regulating dynamics of human life processes.

Disequilibrium of a current state - part of the process (through kriyas, tapas).

Unique individual reactions.

Manifold dependencies and complex mutual influences.



Yoga reminds the system of its own capabilities (or its true nature)

Rekindling of lost ability (healing) or triggering latent potentials (cultivation).

Yoga – Impulse for Long-Term (Unpredictable) Change

Each small yoga exercise activates the human system in many different ways.

Examples of areas of processes:

- Movement system
- Autonomous regulation system
- Mental system



One of the specific effects of yoga practice is the out-take of the response of the totality of processes within a person to the impulse of the yoga practice.

Yoga Works Indirectly

Yoga Sutra 4.3:

Nimittam aprayojakam
prakritinam varana bhedas
tu tatah ksetrikavat.

Incidental causes or actions do not lead to the emergence of attainments or realization but rather come by the removal of obstacles, much like the way a farmer removes a barrier (sluice gate) so as to naturally allow the irrigation of his field.



Yoga works as the impetus for a process that is shaped by the momentum of the human system.

I am the Cold

Thanks to the fundamental bodily experience, yoga becomes a powerful tool that might lead a person toward a new way of self-understanding, new way of being in and reacting to the world.



Cold is a subjective phenomena; a question of perception and training.

Doug Swenson

Habit

The beginning of pride and hatred lies in worldly desire, and the strength of your desire is from habit. – Rumi

Phenomena have no real substance - phenomena is a firing of neurons that is repeated over time and in certain patterns and needs constant reinforcement.

Phenomena are significant activators of being and action.



Patanjali on Altering Behaviour

The key to establishment in yoga (way of being) is dedicated, uninterrupted practice over a long period of time.



Change through Creating a Network of Microhabits

Interrelated habits

Mutually reinforcing habits

Cultivating change through
behaviour



Cultivation

Active Practice

Ahimsa as an active practice rather than a reaction to the world around

Morning pranayama is an active practice rather than a reaction to emotional imbalance

The effect of a yoga practice is highly individualized – it depends on the individual performing yoga



The world and circumstances are always changing in ways beyond our control – what we cultivate we use as a resource to balance in the flux of impermanence.

Never Ever Give Up

Arthur's inspirational transformation through yoga embodiment

When disconnected within, yoga impulse can come from a significant connection outside the (obvious) body-mind system (a coach, therapist)



Life Stages

Case: It starts as support during pregnancy, and continues as a broadened world-view

Case: It started as a school transition support for refugee kids, and continued to be an adventure of self-discovery beyond trauma identification



Case: Alcohol Abuse

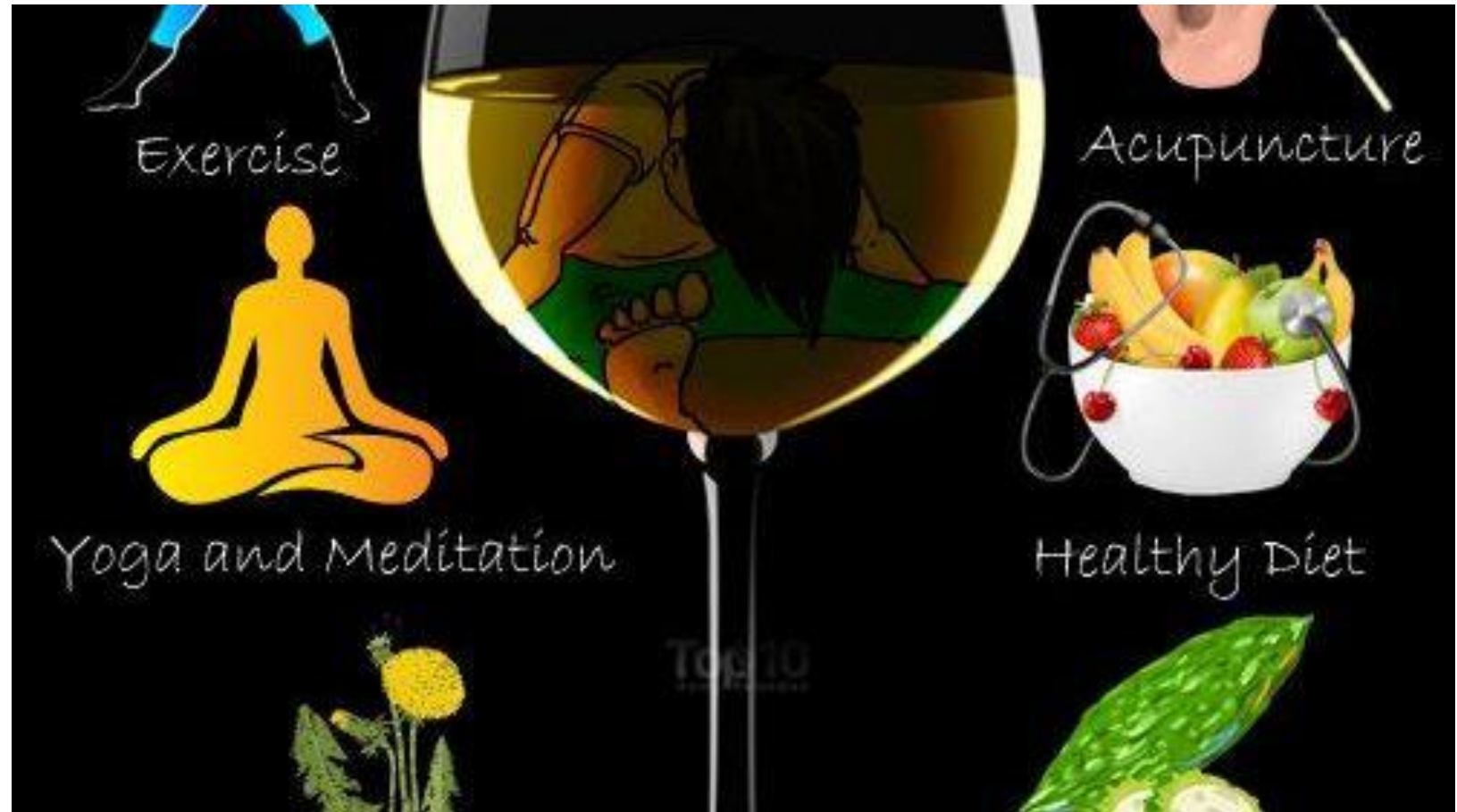
Party has no meaning anymore.

Conversations are meaningless... shallow.

The body feels terrible; I feel sick and disgusting, my yoga the next day is terrible.

I loved to eat meat... now it does not taste the same.

Switch from ignore (the world) to acknowledge (the self).



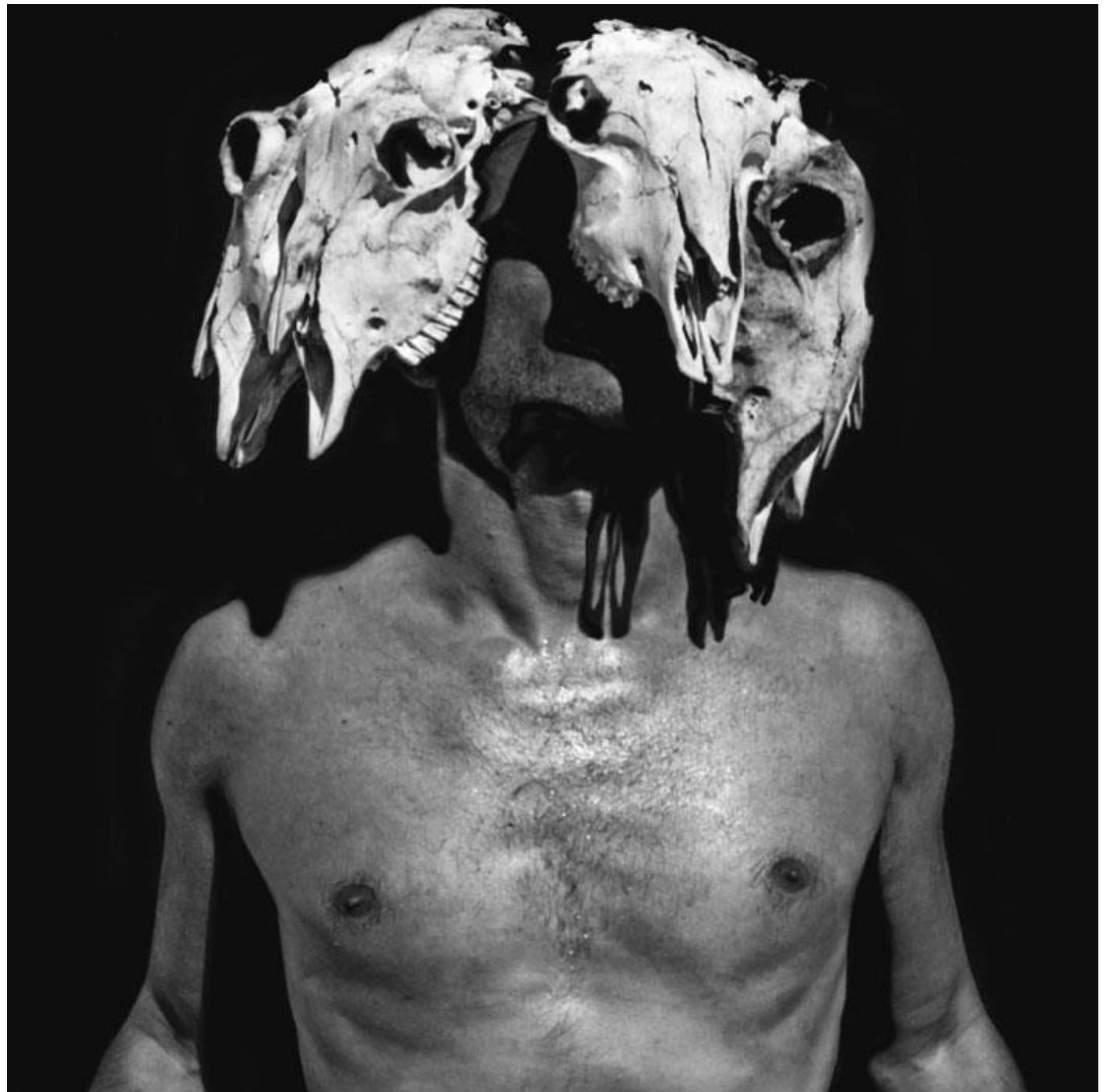
Secondary resources to help the body feel different - moving the set-point.

The Quest for (ecstatic) Transcendence of the human Condition

Shamanism (embodying the
world of spirits, animals)

Religion (institutionalised)

Mysticism (embodying states
of being - the ultimate
liberation)



A Radical Transformation

Need for a change happens when we are not comfortable any more in the comfort zone.

Triggers can be:

- body stiffness and embodied un-ease;
- dis-ease;
- lack of connection (human, nature);
- existential crisis;
- feelings of un-wholeness;



Renunciation and Purgation

Ascetism/austerity or creative self-frustration that challenges our habits and patterns.

Austerity generates psychic energy that can be used to power the process of self-transformation.

Tapas signifies purity and even evoke notions of divinity or at least powers (siddhi)



The goal of austere practices is to be a tool in the replacement of automatic patterns with mindful living.

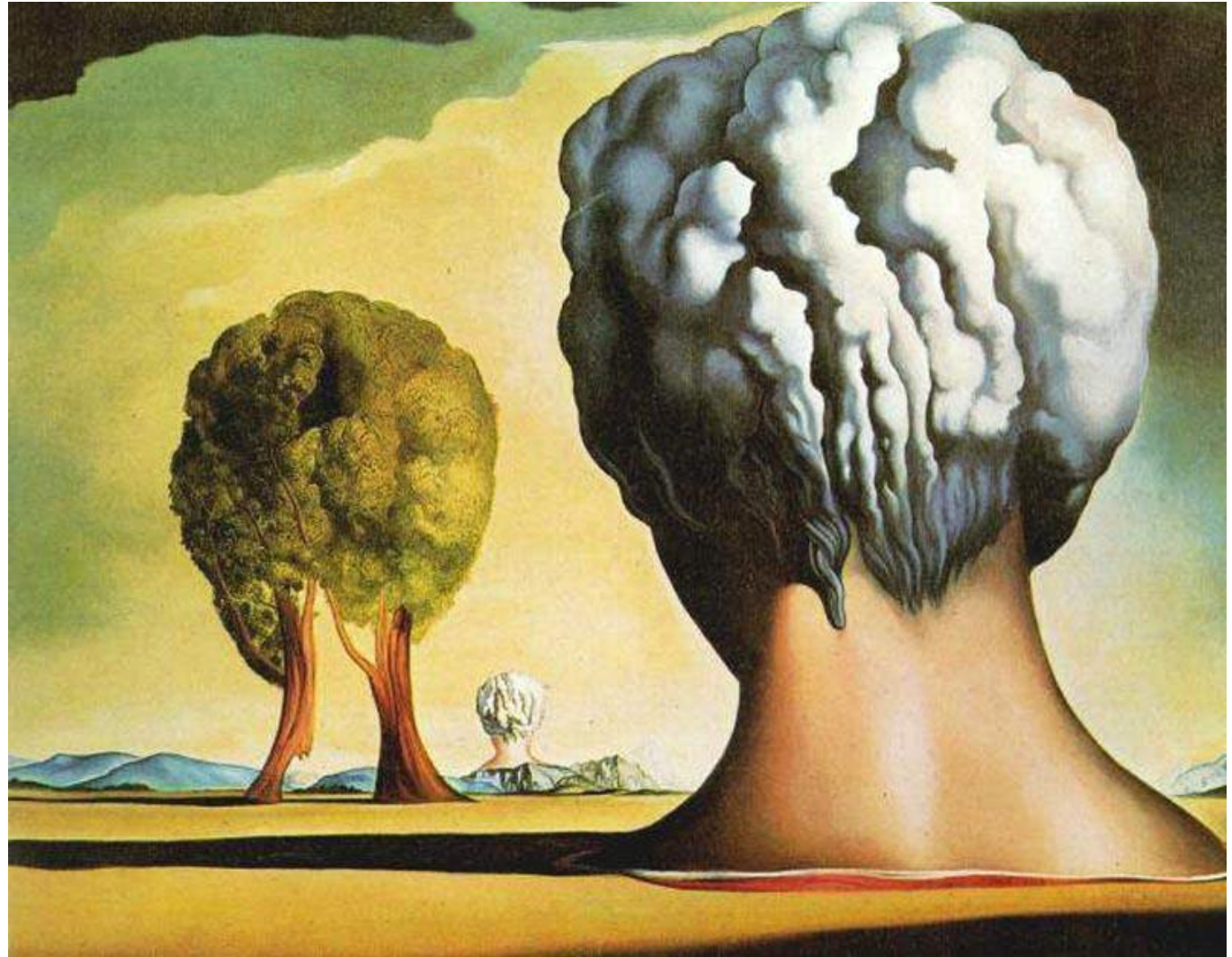
Pain becomes a concrete and solid validation of change.

Pratyahara

The means to disconnect impressions from reactions.

Radical change.

Heightened awareness where one can experience reality as it is (without impression-distraction).



Bringing the impressions of the world within; leaving the impressions in the spectrum of the mind and withdrawing (disconnecting) from the (inner) impressions.

Pratyahara: Patanjali Yoga Sutras

Yoga Sutras 2.54-2.55

When the mental organs of senses and actions (indriyas) cease to be engaged with the corresponding objects in their mental realm, and assimilate or turn back into the mind-field from which they arose, this is called pratyahara, it is the fifth step.

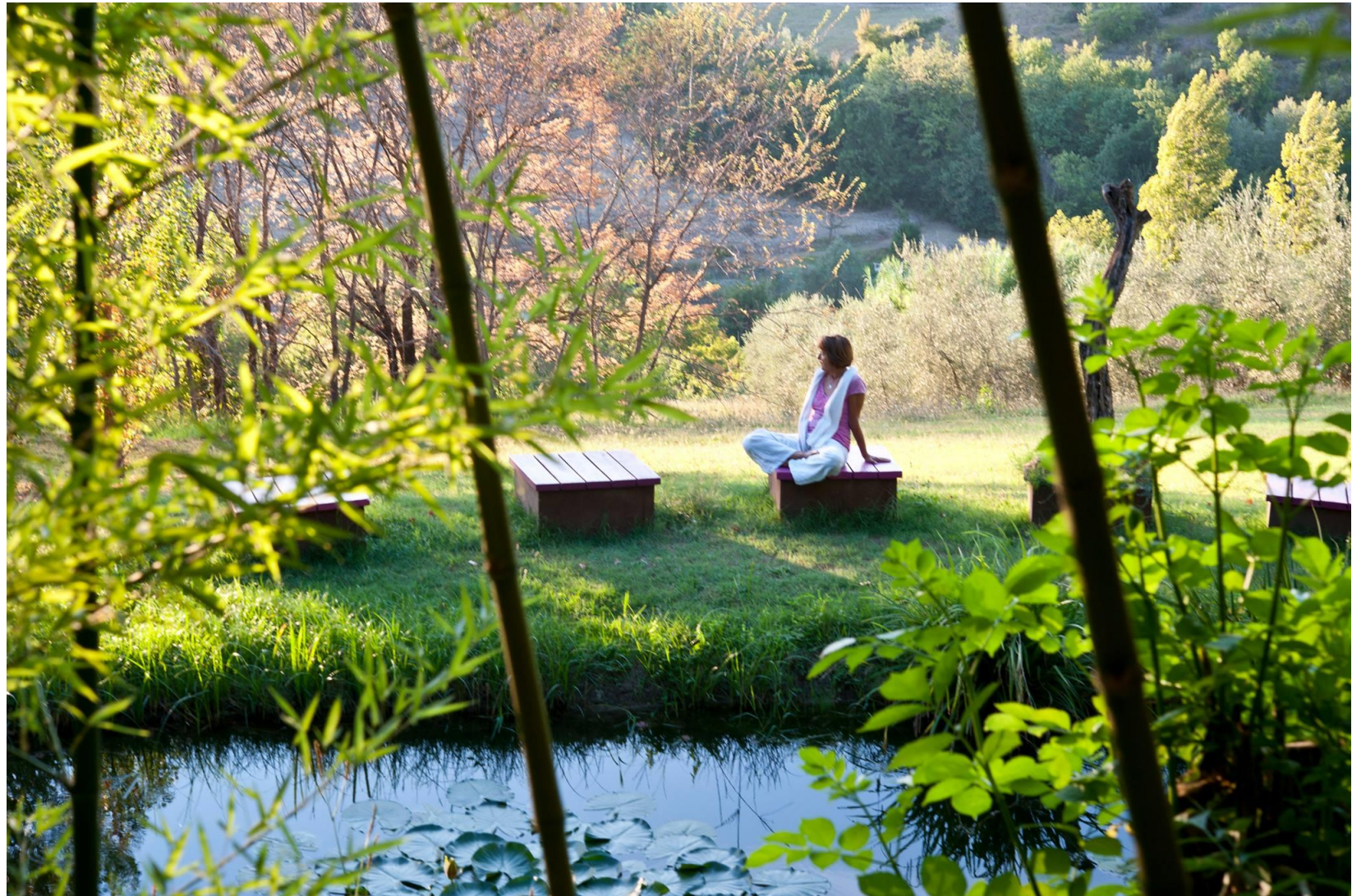
Through that turning inward of the organs of senses and actions (indriyas) also comes a supreme ability, controllability, or mastery over those senses inclining to go outward towards their objects.



Novelty and Meaning

“You do not practice yoga only to stretch and relax, this you can do by many other means. You do yoga because it is a *feeling* of an intimate and sacred meeting with yourself.” *

New ways of experiencing and understanding oneself cannot be reduced to their elements - physical sensation or particular discourse (post linguistic subjectivity). Rather, these experiences reorganise the personal system into a novel gestalt.



Transformed State that Leads to Action

Non-intentional Action

Action in the world not lead by personal conscious or subconscious intentions (ego gratification, personal complexes, ideological believes, kleshas, etc.).

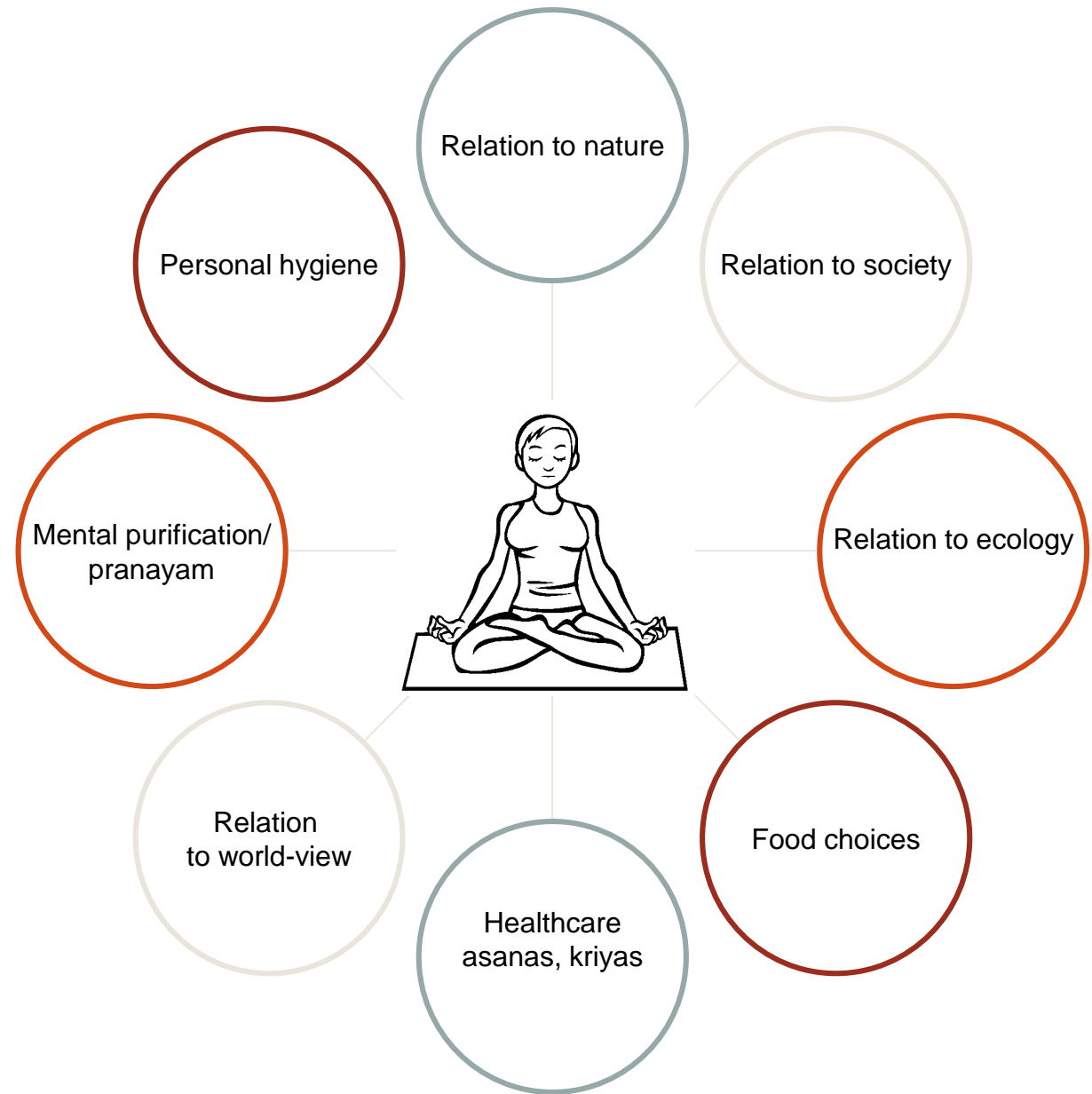
Consciousness does not change, but the focus of awareness and consequently the lifeworld

Selfless action.



Manifold Dependencies and Complex Mutual Influences

The importance of consistency and inter-relatedness of yoga practices.



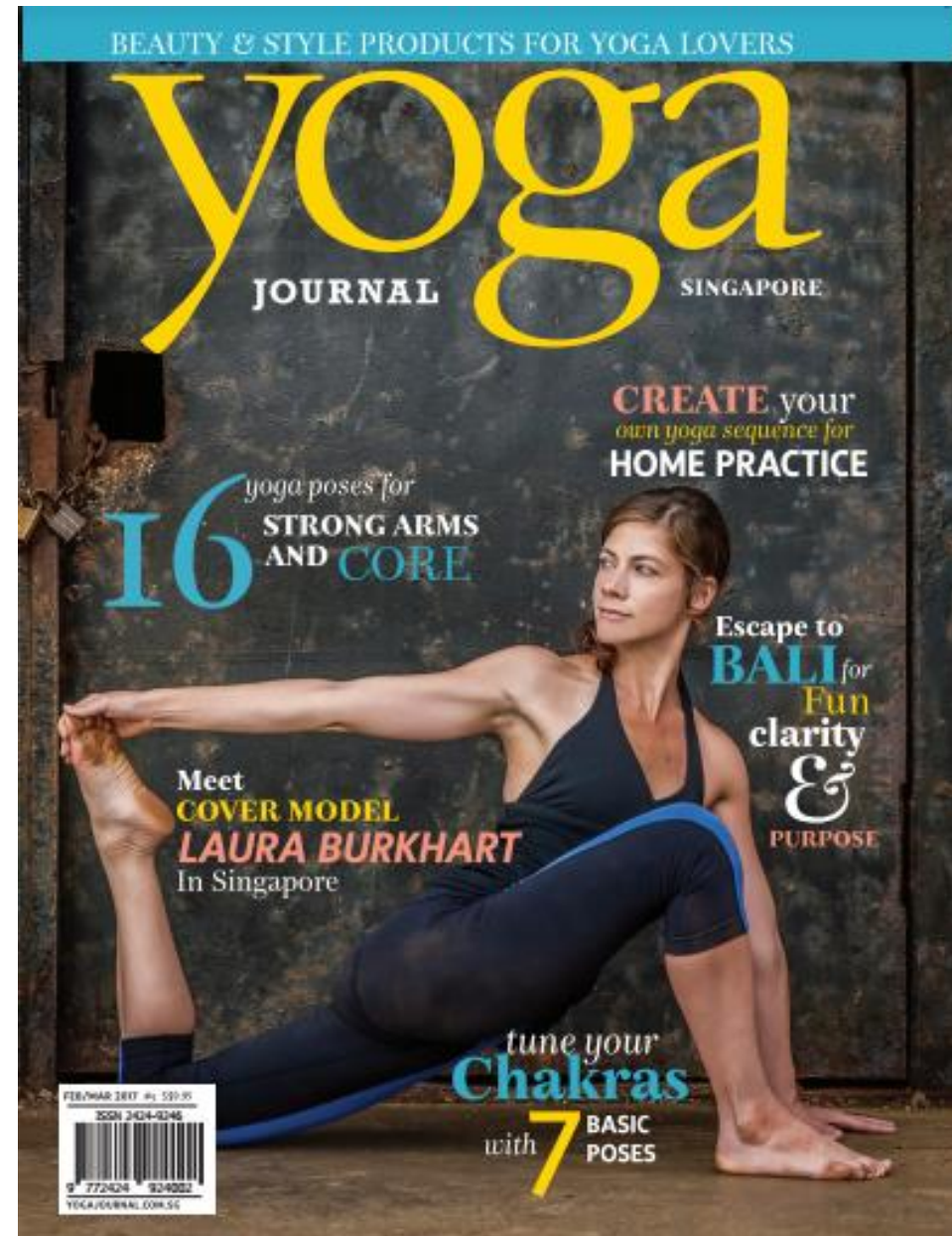
Postural Yoga Today and Embodiment

Visual sources of yoga emphasises the outer process of the body rather than internal states of the mind.

Modern tapas - Excessive practice of asanas as assurance of powers (?).

“Strike the pose” – What kind of neural response are we cultivating?

Keen strive towards a postural yoga ideal leads to injury and stress.



Meaning Creation and Yoga Subculture

Yoga operates within the system of cultural signs and tools that provide a framework for extracting meaning out of experiences.

Distributed within the yoga community in form of different discourses or linguistic devices that give logic to the experience.

Cultural-historical constructivist perspective; discourse analysis of present meaning-creations within yoga communities.

“Namaste” example, cultural appropriation debate, etc.

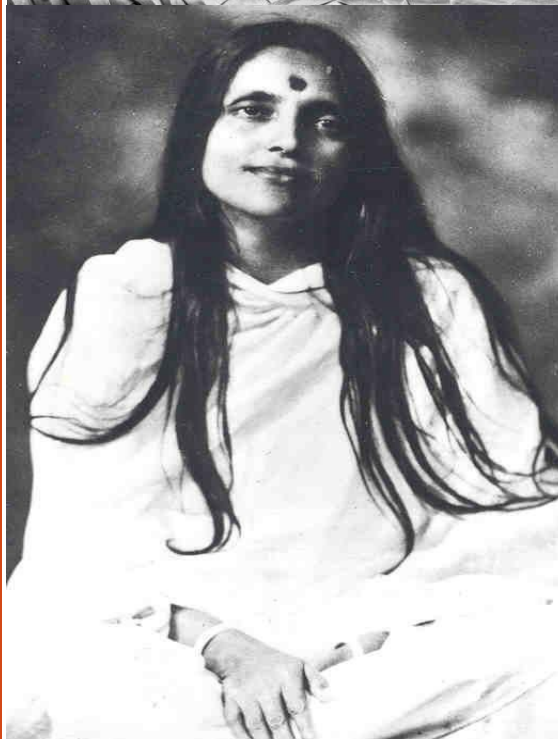


Imaging States of Mind through Body

Textural sources of yoga emphasize the inner process of the mind rather than external actions.

Tapas as assurances of spiritual powers.

Weakened physical state may, paradoxically, offer assurances of spiritual power



Moving Towards the Silence

Finding the balance in the class between instruction and silence.

Instructing on 4 levels:

- Biomechanical
- Energetical
- Metaphorical/Spiritual
- Living being silence





Thank you Arctic Yoga Conference! With gratitude, Samvidyoga w/Lea Loncar

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