

What is 'YOGA'?

Global Capitalism and the Politics of Awareness



Peter Wilberg

2008

WHAT IS 'YOGA'?

Global Capitalism and the Politics of Awareness

'Yoga' today is most generally taken to be – and practiced as - a system of physical stretching and bending exercises for 'health' and 'well-being' ('Hatha Yoga') based on a set of bodily postures or 'Asanas'. This "phoney yoga" of stretching and bending is a 20th century invention that could be called 'American yoga'. As documented by Linda Sparrowe, it was introduced to America In 1947 by Theos Bernard, author of one of the first guidebooks to Yoga Asanas and popularised in the 1950's. As a result:

"By 1961, thanks to the power of television, Americans everywhere were learning a non-religious, decidedly unspiritual form of yoga exercise."

This is the reason why 'yoga' today (American yoga) is not so much the noble continuation of an ancient tradition of religious and spiritual wisdom but a global New Age industry – a commercial medium for the marketing of yoga mats and straps, belts and bolsters, cushions and clothing, pillows and props, books and CDs, instructional videos and personal fitness regimes. Though American yoga drew from 'Hatha Yoga' (meaning 'violent' or 'forced' yoga), the latter was a relatively late and minor form of yoga. Though it had much deeper historical roots, it did not regard itself as 'yoga for beginners' but rather as suitable only for the most advanced practitioners of non-physical forms of spiritual yoga practice and meditation. Though yoga teachers pay lip service to the 'Bible' of classical yoga – 'The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali' – this makes no reference to Hatha Yoga as one of the branches of yoga, nor does it describe systems of yoga postures or Asanas. Indeed the only basic posture it refers to is simply 'sitting comfortably', preferably with 'the spine erect'.

What passes as 'Yoga' today then, has become little more than a global commercial industry – a respectable bourgeois 'opium' for the middle classes of East and West. The NEW Yoga, the Yoga of Awareness is no part of this global industry. Its purpose is not to spiritually *compensate for* or *ameliorate* the stresses of life under global capitalism but instead to subvert and overturn the ignorant and narrow 'consciousness' underlying it – to bring about a global revolution in awareness and the dawning of a deepened and expanded awareness, not through war or violence but through awareness itself.

The NEW Yoga recognises *awareness as such* as the biggest single threat to global capitalism. For this is a system which relies for its survival on ensuring that individuals are kept so busy *doing* – selling their time to employers to survive - that they have no time to become more aware of what they are doing, who for and why. The result is a world in which economic wealth is paid for through time poverty, attained by economically exploiting the labour time of others, and used to pursue ever-new ways of squandering time or making more money. Consequently, people feel that they either have 'no time' or - whether super-rich or poor and unemployed - do not know what to 'do' with the time they have except squander it, reinforcing the capitalist work ethic that 'the devil makes work for idle hands'. Even those in so-called 'employment' suffer from the hidden unemployment of their individual creative potentials, which find expression at best, only as hobbies or part-time activities.

Karl Marx is often quoted as declaring that individuals' awareness is constricted by their "social being" - their economic status in class society. For Marx this was not an eternal truth but a temporary condition associated with class societies, and the ruthless exploitation of labour

time. Therefore the converse truth also holds – individuals can save the world from the stranglehold of class society in its final stage – global capitalism – only by expanding their awareness. This means resisting all pressures which prevent them taking time to be aware - thus expanding their awareness and freeing it from bondage to the narrow worlds of wage slavery on the one hand, and consumerism on the other.

The New Yoga of Awareness is therefore a fundamentally subversive and revolutionary yoga. Its aim is nothing less than a *global revolution in awareness*, one that fulfils John Buchan's dream of a "4-dimensional Communism" - one that recognises that the capitalist degradation of human life begins with the exploitation and degradation of time. The notion of 4-dimensional Communism is one that, like Marx himself, recognises the 4th dimension – time - as the *frontline* in the struggle for a new world. This is a world that can come about only by educating and empowering individuals - in whatever personal, relational, institutional, corporate or political contexts they live and work in – to expand, deepen and enrich the awareness they bring to themselves and others, to their work and to the world.

Yet time itself is not just an extra '4th' dimension pinned onto the three dimensions of space that we know. Time is the very *space* of awareness, more or less expanded or contracted, that we feel in the moment. That is why, when we speak of having 'no space' or 'no time' for something or someone, or of wanting more 'space' or 'time' for ourselves or others, we mean the same thing. That is also why The New Yoga of Awareness is not about stretching our bodies in space or holding them in particular positions for long times. Instead is about stretching the time-space of our awareness.

This is all the more important today because the ever more plain and obvious fact is that humanity is fast *running out of time* - and that if it is to survive much longer, we can no longer afford to maintain a society in which 'yoga' and 'meditation' are a middle class 'spiritual' luxury misused to compensate for the 'stresses' of global capitalism - rather than to overcome its entire culture of busy-ness, time exploitation and time poverty. Awareness is not a luxury that we can only afford to give ourselves at special times through commercial, profit-driven classes in 'yoga' or 'meditation'. For the true purpose of practicing yogic meditation is to teach us to be more aware *at all times* - and to *identify* at all times with awareness as such - with 'pure' or 'transcendental' awareness. Pure or transcendental awareness is a spacious awareness - for just as space both embraces and transcends every thing we perceive within it, so does pure awareness embrace and transcend all 'contents' of consciousness, all that we are merely aware *of* within it. Indeed *space as such* is nothing merely physical but is an infinite spatial field *of* awareness, an awareness that, like space, is not private property, yours or mine, but the very essence of the divine.

What we ordinarily call 'consciousness' is a purely focal awareness, always focused on one thing or another. Through it, our 'being in time' is reduced to 'going from one thing to another' and 'doing one thing after another' - in other words passing from one *focus* of awareness to another without any meditative intervals or 'intermezzos' in which to regather ourselves, recollect events in the context of our lives as a whole and allow new reflections and insights to arise from our awareness - thus allowing us to decide, *with* awareness, what we do next and how. Without giving ourselves these *time* intervals in which to simply abide in awareness, the *space* of our awareness is contracted to a single focus and we lose a sense of the expansive field of awareness in which we dwell. We become

like dwellers in a spacious ocean of awareness - dwellers so used to just focussing their awareness on one thing or another within that ocean that they have ceased to be aware of the ocean as such – no longer seeing it, sensing it or even surmising its existence.

A basic principle of The New Yoga is that we all dwell in pure awareness as we dwell in *space* itself. We can identify with pure awareness by identifying *with* the space around and within our bodies, around and within things and around and within our thoughts and feelings. Learning to identify with space opens up for us a larger, spacious *field* of awareness. This “free awareness field” (Jane Roberts) is what alone can prevent us falling into bondage to any particular *focus of awareness* –stopping it from preoccupying or filling up our minds, weighing down our feelings, wearing down our bodies, and unwillingly dominating our lives.

We are as much aware of our self as a whole – our soul – as we are aware of our body as a whole, both from within and as a part of the entire space around it. The moment a person’s AWARENESS of the inner and outer *spaces* of their body and mind is replaced by identification with their current bodily and mental *states*, they become unfree – attached to those states rather than freed by the larger field of those spaces. The moment a person loses awareness of the *body* as a whole – including both the spaces within and around it - their awareness of their *self* as a whole is contracted too. Because of this contraction, they can only relate to themselves, other people and the world from a small part of themselves and in a purely reactive and unaware way.

The New Yoga is designed to cultivate not only a new type of aware experiencing, but through it, *aware action* – action of the sort that alone can save us from the wholly unaware and *reactive* actions of world

politicians. In the political movements of the 1960's the word 'awareness' was associated with action designed to raise people's 'awareness' or 'consciousness' of uncomfortable political, economic and ecological facts and events - thereby confronting them with the need for worldwide revolution. In The New Yoga, the political importance of the term 'awareness' does not simply lie only in worldly *action* designed to 'raise' awareness *of* something, however important. Instead it has to do with attaining the freedom and power of truly *aware* action *in* the world - action that comes from an awareness free of identification *with* the turmoil of the world.

"In robbing us of time, today's culture also robs us of dignity. But dignity has no great value in a culture devoted to progress, power and productivity. Since time is money in modern culture, few of us can afford dignity."

Alexander Lowen, in *Bioenergetics*

Today's world faces a grave economic, ecological, cultural crisis – indeed a global civilisational crisis. The word 'crisis' means a 'turning point' in time. The basic need expressed in this crisis however, is to find a way of 'being-in-time' and 'being-in-the-world' that is no longer dominated by 'busyness' – by *doing* – and aimed only at having what we need to survive, or more. The *new* relation to time that human beings so desperately need at this time is one in which they freely allow themselves more time, not just to produce or consume, work or play – but be aware. For to truly 'be' is to be aware. Just as to truly 'meditate' is simply to take *time* to be aware, and to abide in the inner stillness and silence of pure awareness as such. Only out of this ability to be aware and to abide in awareness can come better decisions and deeper more aware solutions to world problems. Only by taking *time* to be aware and to abide in meditative awareness can

people learn to be and relate to others in a more meditative and aware way – thus transforming human relations. And only through meditative awareness can important *decisions*, whether in personal life, business, management or government be properly pre-meditated, taken with full awareness of all there is to be aware of. All mismanagement, mistreatment and misgovernment of others stem from the self-defeating rush of busy-ness, from denying oneself and others time to fully meditate decisions in full awareness of all the facts. Paradoxically however, it is our very culture of speed and busy-ness - and the value it places on ‘quick thinking’ that prevents deep thinking and ends up endlessly delaying aware and effective decisions and actions.

Global capitalism demands that people be kept busy and active in a wholly unaware way - forcing them to sell their labour time as a commodity to the highest corporate bidder in order to produce and purchase ever-more profitable but mind-numbing technological products and services. The global economic culture of ‘work’ is effectively still a system of enforced economic *conscriptio*n or ‘wage slavery’ - serving nothing but the ruthless exploitation of both human beings and nature. Only a revolution in awareness can prevent capitalism from destroying the earth. Yet this is revolution that cannot be achieved through political means alone - let alone through war or violence - but only through raising humankind to a higher level of awareness. That is why the military, economic and ecological crisis and devastation wrought by global capitalism tells us one thing alone – IT IS HIGH TIME FOR HUMANITY TO BE AWARE. Yet how is this awareness to be attained?

“Only a god can save us now.”

Martin Heidegger

The god that Heidegger refers to here is one he describes as “totally other” than the Christian God, and transcending all types of “theism”. The birth of The NEW Yoga marks the dawning of that ‘god’ – a ‘god’, which is not a supreme being ‘with’ awareness but IS awareness. For The NEW Yoga is the Yoga of Awareness in another sense too - recognising awareness as the *ultimate reality* behind all things and thoughts, all things and all worlds - for it is the very condition for our experience of any thing or thought, self or being, world or universe whatsoever. Awareness is not the *private property* of things or bodies, persons or beings. This is the basic myth born of property- and class-based societies, a myth unquestioned by the fundamentalist dogmas of both secular science and all those religions which see ‘God’ as an ultimate or supreme *being* - rather than as an ultimate, supreme or divine *awareness*. Only in particular Hindu yogic traditions do we find a recognition of that ‘God’ which is not a supreme being ‘with’ awareness but IS awareness, infinite and unbounded. ‘Yoga’ means to yoke, conjoin or unite. The NEW Yoga is not a secular, commercialized yoga of ‘well-being’. Instead it allows us to conjoin our consciousness with that infinite and universal awareness which IS God - an awareness of which our own being and all beings are a unique portion and expression. Within the context of the so-called ‘clash of civilizations’ – in reality the clash of reactionary Christian fundamentalism and global military and economic imperialism with reactionary political Islamism - a renewal of this, the inner truth of what is called ‘Hinduism’, could play a vital role in bringing about a global revolution in awareness. Yet for this to possibility to be realized, the renewal of Hinduism must take the form of a new *non-ethnic, non-violent* and *internationalist* world-view – rather than being restricted to an aggressive form of *narrow, ethnic Hindu nationalism* confined to India itself – thus continuing to degrade ‘yoga’ to the status of a commercialized global industry and ‘spiritual’ export.

References:

Martin Heidegger, *Spiegel* interview

Martin Heidegger Contributions to Philosophy,
translated by Emad and Maly, Indiana University Press 1999

Alexander Lowen, *Bioenergetics*

Linda Sparrowe, *The History of Yoga*, excerpted from
Yoga, A Yoga Journal Book

Peter Wilberg, '*What is Meditation?*' at www.thenewyoga.org

Peter Wilberg, *Tantric Wisdom for Today's World*, New Yoga Publications 2007

Links:

www.classicalyoga.org

www.thenewsocialism.org

www.thenewscience.org