

Yoga & Buddhsim : Its Philosophy And Thought Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Yoga is a practice which combines the mind and body to promote better mental and physical postures and exercises which encourage the development of strength and flexibility, breathing techniques as well as exercise in mindfulness, meditation and relaxation which are performed together in order to train attention.

The science of positive psychology often touches on the topic of mindfulness. This term was originally introduced by the ancient teaching of the Buddha. In Buddhism, the cultivation of mindfulness is achieved through meditation. Exploring mindfulness and its root in yoga and meditation will be helpful in understanding the role it can play for positive psychology. The core of Buddha's teaching are based on four concepts namely: suffering, craving, liberation from suffering and the eight fold path.

Yoga has two main principles which align with Buddhism; one is liberation from suffering and the other is ridding the mind of misconceptions, thus reducing craving and eventually realizing the end of our suffering. According to Buddhist philosophy, suffering is unavoidable. The fundamental themes of self-discipline, mindfulness, concentration and "being in the present" are introduced in Buddhist as well as Yoga philosophy. These are easily compared to the concepts of self-control and flow presented by positive psychology.

Keywords: Yoga, Buddhism, mindfulness, suffering, concentration.

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Introduction

This paper gives the correlation between the two major traditions of Indian philosophy i.e. Yoga and Buddhism. Yoga is essentially a Hindu tradition with its root in the Vedic ritual symbolism and its internalization. The ascetic practices of both Hinduism draw heavily from ancient yoga traditions in their respective ways to practice self transformation. The system of yoga came to us mostly through ancient Shaivite traditions that existed in the Indian subcontinent prior to the pre-eminence of Vedic religion. Regarding the connection between Buddhism and yoga, Dr. S.Radhakrishnan points out that the Buddha practiced yoga and that Buddhism introduced many contemplative practices that were common to both Hinduism and yoga. He writes thus-

“According to Lalitavistara, numberless forms of ascetic austerities were in vogue in Buddha’s time. The Buddhas sutta are familiar with the yoga methods of concentration. The four states of dhyāna of Buddhism correspond roughly to the four stages of conscious concentration in classical yoga. According to Buddhism, the possession of the five qualities of faith, energy, thought, concentration and wisdom, enables one to attain the end of yoga and the yoga accepts the view. The Yogācāra school of Buddhism openly combines Buddhist doctrine with the yoga details. The later Buddhist works assume a developed yoga techniques.”

Types of Yoga and its correlation with Buddhism

Yoga is a perfect practical system of self culture. It helps one attain harmonious

development of one’s mind and in unfolding various concentration of the mind. It also plays a vital role in developing one’s various physical and mental powers. The practice of Buddhism provides insightful solutions to the vexing problems of humanity such as violence, stress and suffering. Buddhism is essentially a religion of the mind rather than the spirit. It is grounded in reality, and its practices and solutions are verifiable and repeatable. The Buddhist philosophy is based on four noble truths and the eight fold path. Patanjali, became very famous for his systematized study of human psychology and physique. He systematized and made available the thoughts and secrets of mind through his composition of Yogasūtra.

There are different types of Yoga which are as follows:

Rājayoga, Hathayoga, Mantrayoga, Layayoga, Bhaktiyoga, Kundaliniyoga, Karmayoga, Dhyānayoga, Jyāyoga etc.

Rājayoga is called as the king of all kinds of yoga because it is the highest type of yoga i.e, Samadhi. Patanjali’s contribution of yoga is based on the principle of contemplation. Samādhi is the highest type or stage in which the mind is perfectly balanced. It is a meditative absorption or trance, attained by the practice of dhyāna. In Samādhi the mind becomes still. It is a state of being totally aware of the present moment, a one-pointedness of mind. In Buddhism, it is the last of the eight elements of the Noble Eight Fold Path. It is one of the three basic constituents of the teaching of Buddha. These three constituents are Śīla, Samādhi and Prajñā. When the mind is fully concentrated on the object and remains fixed or still like the flame of a lamp in the

breezeless atmosphere, it is called 'Samādhi' which carries one beyond senses and flings open the door of enlightenment.

In the Bhagavadgītā the Karmayoga refers to the 'Law of Karma' which is known as the path of action. The Bhagavadgītā describes it in mainly in the third chapter. Kramayoga aims at perfection in action and tell us how to renounce personal aims when acting or performing good karma. In Buddhism Right action is the fourth step in noble eight fold path. Actions can mainly be divided in to two categories, viz. good and bad or moral and immoral. The action in the performance of which mind is defiled with evil propensities such as greed, hatred etc. is definitely bad. The good deed on the other hand, the performance of which elevates the mind with the feelings of piety and purity, love and devotion etc. is the right action. This includes offering of pūja, charity, observance of moral precepts etc.

The Bhagavadgītā propounds jñānayoga also. It is the path of knowledge. Knowledge, which is the personal experience of the divine self directly, is the way of attaining the path of liberation again in the Brahmanic literature. A jñānayogi of the Advaita Vedanta system follows these three stages i.e. Śravaṇa (hearing), Manana (thinking) and Nididhyasana (constant meditation). In Buddhism means of knowledge described as Pramāṇa, which is of two types Pratyaksha (perception) and Anumāna (inference).

Dhyānayoga is the path of meditation. The aspirants in this path have to acquire peace and tranquility of mind. This yoga teaches one how to maintain peace for the practice of meditation. In Buddhism right mindfulness or right meditation belongs to the seventh stage of noble eight fold path. The tracing of all activities of body and mind or to be mindful thereof is a well known method of meditation which absorbs the

mind and paves the way to spiritual achievements.

Yama and Pañcaśīla-

Yama, the five major steps or aids of yoga and Pañcaśīla, the five precepts of Buddhism were the two major limbs of Indian philosophy. Patañjali narrates Yama as five types as, Ahimsā-non-violence, satya-truthfulness, asteya-non stealing, brahmacharya-continence or complete abstention from sexual matter and aparigraha-non possession.

The Five Precepts constitute the basic code of ethics undertaken by upāsaka and upāsikā ("lay followers") of Buddhism. The following are the five precepts or five virtues are:-

I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing. (Ahimsa)

I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given. (Asteya)

I undertake the training rule to avoid sexual misconduct. (Brahmacharya)

I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech.(satya)

I undertake the training rule to abstain from fermented drink that causes heedlessness. (Aparigraha).

The precepts in all traditions are essentially identical and are commitments to abstain from harming living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. A precept in general rule intended to regulate behavior and thought.

Prajña and Avidyā

These are one of the main concepts of both traditions. Patanjali in his famous Yogasūtra, mentions that Avidyā (ignorance) is the root cause of all types of false notions. Once this is removed then Prajñā (knowledge) only remains, where the seed of false knowledge cannot be through again. Patanjali says that viveka 'discriminative

knowledge' is the true recognition of the independent nature of Puruśa. Buddhist philosophy of dependent origination deals with the ignorance. Ignorance of the truth of suffering, its cause, its end, and the way to its end, is the chief cause that sets the wheel of life in motion. Buddha says:

'Ignorance is the deep delusion wherein we here so long are circling round.'

Avidyā is removed by the practice of Prajñā. It is the highest knowledge. It is the state where suspension of all conscious activities takes place.

The yoga prescribes āsana (posture), pranāyama (breathing exercise) and pratyāhāra (withdrawal of the senses), dhāraṇa (concentration) and dhyāna (meditation) for the cessation of mental modification. Buddhism prescribes right concentration and right mindfulness to bring the mind under control and develop equanimity of the mind (samatha bhāvana). The anapana sati of Buddhism is similar in intent and practice with the pranāyama of yoga.

Liberation

Yoga in Hinduism is widely classified into four spiritual practices. The first mārga is jñāna yoga, the way of knowledge. The second mārga is bhakti yoga, the way of loving devotion to God. The third mārga is karma yoga, the way of works. The fourth mārga is rājayoga, the way of contemplation and meditation. These are parts of different schools in Hinduism and their definition and methods of liberation.

In Buddhism the most common term for liberation is Nirvana. It literally means "blowing out", "quenching" or "becoming extinguished". Nirvana has been described in Buddhist texts in a manner similar to other Indian religions, as the state of complete liberation, enlightenment, highest happiness, bliss, fearless, freedom, suffering-less,

permanence, non-dependent origination, unfathomable, indescribable. It has also been described as a state of release marked by emptiness and realization of non-self.

Nirvana and moksha, in all traditions, represent a state of being in ultimate reality and perfection, but are described in very different ways.

Karma and rebirth

Both systems see karma as the main causative factor behind rebirth in the world. However, in Buddhism karma is said to be a self-existent principle. Buddhism states that the world exists owing to the beginningless karma of living beings. In the yoga traditions, however, karma is not a self-existent principle. The world is created by God (īśvara), the creative aspect of consciousness. Karma is mere force of inertia and is attached to rebirth. Yoga recognizes the existence of a jiva or individual soul who is reborn. Buddhism denies the existence of such a soul and says that rebirth is just the continuance of a stream of Karma, not any real entity.

Conclusion

Yoga and Buddhism are sister traditions which evolved in the same spiritual culture of ancient India. They use many of the same terms and follow many of the same principles and practices. Both Buddhism and yoga aim to end human suffering and bondage but prescribe different techniques and approaches to achieve the same. Yoga aims to end suffering by suppressing the modifications of mind through the eightfold yoga while Buddhism by the cessation of desires through the eightfold path, of which right mindfulness and right concentration aim to control the mind and purify it through techniques similar to yoga.

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