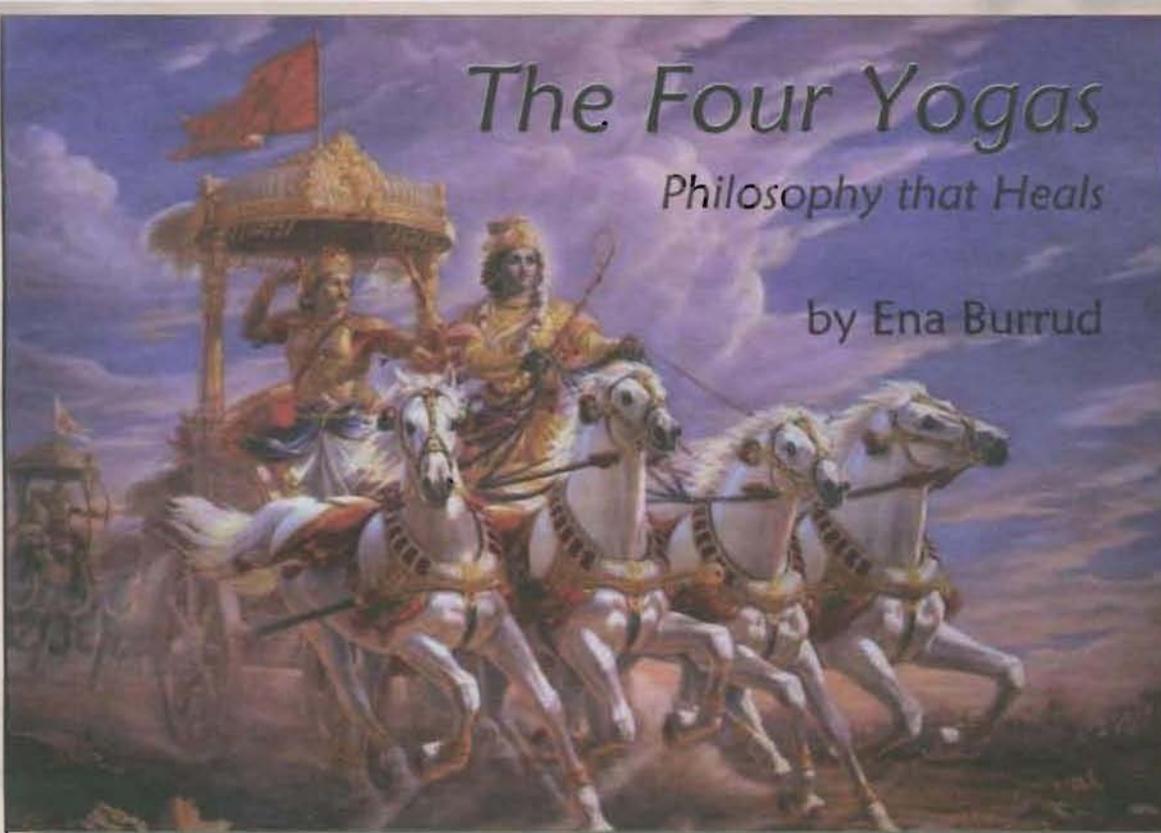


The Four Yogas

Philosophy that Heals

by Ena Burrud



Within the scope of Yoga Therapy, yoga philosophy and applied yoga psychology are powerful modes of healing. Sometimes, a sprinkle will do depending on the client, like healing from an injury. But, for addressing depression, anxiety, or abuse, it can be a huge part of the work. All spiritual and religious paths have quintessential texts outlining various ways of thinking and behaving. Among the Yoga texts are the Vedas, the Upanishads and various sutras. However, it is from the Bhagavad Gita (BG) we derive a vital discourse known as the "Four Yogas."

I recently spent a weekend with colleagues and our teacher, Sarasvati Burhman, a disciple of Baba Hari Dass. We were studying the *Mahabharata*, the story of India. The sixth book of this tome is the Bhagavad Gita (Song of the Blessed One). Suspended in a swollen moment in time, Arjuna and trusted avatar, Krishna, stand before the formations of an imminent battle. This is the beginning of the Gita.

Arjuna is our hero and one of five virtuous Pandava brothers. His position (*varna-ashrama*) in Vedic society was that of warrior (*Kshatriya*), and so the setting of the battlefield is an appropriate backdrop. Leading up to this moment are acts of crazy familial jealousy and immorality by Duryodhana, the leader of the Kauravas clan, the one hundred and one cousins to the Pandavas. After having been unfairly exiled in the forest for 13 years, the Pandavas, their beautiful wife Draupadi and mother, Kunti, return for their kingdom, as per agreed, only to be cheated once again out of their reign and rightful rewards.

The conch shells blown, family members, lifetime acquaintances, and teachers are amassed on the field (*kshetra*) of battle. Opposite Arjuna, titillated to fight, was the darkly obsessive,

greedy Duryodhana. As Arjuna weighs the scene and foresees the many consequences of this war, however, he is seized by a monumental, existential panic attack.

Enter Krishna, embodiment of Universal wisdom and celestial personality. Standing by Arjuna in his chariot and always at the call of the Pandavas, he assesses the sweaty, shaking countenance and counsels Arjuna. Yudisthira, the oldest brother, often referred to Krishna as the "infallible" one. Not because Krishna lacks feelings of his own, but that his actions are governed by a contextual moral law. Krishna's displays of anger and occasional trickery give us pause to regard our own psyches and shadows. But, to follow his lead means to honor and keep our word and to fulfill the dharma (the path of the greater good). Arjuna's mind, quick with point and counterpoint, finally accepts his duty. He fights the destined battle.

What did Krishna reveal? Knowing that the Pandavas must finally take back their kingdom, he unveils the Four Yogas: Karma (service), Jnana (wisdom and discernment), Raja (meditation), and Bhakti (devotion). Each of these can be a separate practice with differentiated emphasis; but, as one of my teachers, Douglas Brooks, writes in *Poised for Grace* (Anusara Press, 2008), "[Krishna] asserts our need for multiple strategies and notes how each kind of yoga suits a person and circumstance differently."

Arjuna is confounded by his *desire* to both win and refrain. We have all been here. We have had muddy thinking (*tamas*) or surging stings (*rajas*) of dissonance that betray our gut. The four yogas work in yoga therapy to help with these dilemmas, clarifying our choices. The field (*kshetra*) of consciousness has its own battles and Krishna is within us all.

RAJA YOGA: THE YOGA OF MEDITATION

Arjuna spoke: This yoga which is declared by You As evenness of mind, Krishna, I do not perceive The steady continuance of this because of (the mind's) instability.

The mind, indeed, is unstable, Krishna, Turbulent, powerful and obstinate; I think it is as difficult To control as the wind. (BG chapter 6, Verse 33-34)

One of the characteristics of an accomplished yogi is steadiness of mind. We all have a continuous flow of thoughts and feelings morphing in our lives. How we perceive them (action) depends on wisdom (*jnana*) and equanimity. Arjuna states the obvious paradox; how can we steady our minds with minds that are unsteady? But, like the saying goes, let the muddy water sit and it will clear. This is meditation.

The mind is obstinate and mercurial. However, through regular practice of sitting, we gain skill at steadying reactive minds. When the surface of the water of our psyches has become glassy, we see ourselves clearly. Verse 29 encourages us that we will then see our own souls and see others as well. We recognize souls are all of the same form (or formlessness). This connectedness is a state we always live in; it's just easier to feel when we meditate or take time to contemplate, or just be in the moment.

Trauma imprisons layers of physical tissues with chemical and hormonal messages. Carolyn Myss, a medical intuitive with numerous books and seminars, calls this phenomenon, *Issues in our Tissues*. Within the subconscious realm, it is the same. Recurring images or fear disrupt our lives, as in PTSD. Using guided imagery techniques and yoga nidra the mind processes and releases the past. Raja yoga empowers us in this way.

BHAKTI YOGA: THE YOGA OF DEVOTION

The yogin who is always contented and balanced in mind, Who is self-controlled, and whose conviction is firm, Whose mind and intellect are fixed on Me, And who is devoted to Me, is dear to Me. (BG chapter 12, Verse 14)

In this chapter, we are taught the ways of honoring the divine. We may do so in two ways, worshipping with or without attributes or form. Some come to feel the divine through picturing a god, or goddess, or saints. Others need only release into undefined spaciousness. Either technique enables the mystery to penetrate our hearts and minds. Krishna says both will bring us to him.

With anxiety, concentrating (*dharana*) on an image, a feeling, or a concept affects safe containment, like the bedroom of our childhoods. Extraneous thinking dissolves. Chanting mantra (*japa*) works similarly by using voice and vibration to traverse the mind and heart. Conversely, despondency generally responds well to using no object as a practice. Depression feels so heavy and immovable, this expands ones sense of breathing room and improves mood.

Devotion sustains love. Brooks writes, "Love extends not only to God, but also to all creatures and creates in the yogin the personality that embraces all things as God's presence." Classical yoga and tantra utilize several tools, like mantra, hatha yoga, meditation, and satsang to help us stay oriented to higher purpose. We realize our wholeness, that we are not separated from Source. Having felt it before, we have faith (*shraddha*) that we will feel it again. So, we practice. That Universal love fosters forgiveness, compassion (*karuna*), and true desire (*iccha-shakti*). This love heals.

While embodied we act. Karma yoga refines our actions through self-less service and duty. Like stages of development, evolving actions are part of our natural maturation. But, our higher minds discern greater peace through acting with wisdom. Jnana yoga integrates that which we have learned from teachers and personal experiences. We understand through reflection. Raja yoga forges steadiness to see what we know. We accept pain and pleasure with equanimity. Beauty is more apparent in our ease and our struggles. Having a desire to feel the One, and to stay in that embrace as long as possible is Bhakti yoga. This is wholeness, the yoking the word *yoga* refers to. Our destiny is to be here together.



Ena Burrud, E-RYT is owner of Treetop Yoga Therapy, a private practice A yogi since 1997, she received her first certification in 2000. Others include Erich Schiffmann, Yoga Studies at UCI and LMU in LA, Yoga Nidra and Rocky Mountain Institute of Yoga and Ayurveda. She is on the faculty at RMIYA where she will be teaching in the 200 and 500 hr. programs early 2012. Her teachers are Sarasvati Buhman PhD, Douglas Brooks PhD, and Ed and Deb Shapiro. Ena is on the board of Open Stage Theater, bringing her love of the arts to her approach as a teacher. She is mother to three kids and two dogs. www.TreetopYogaTherapy.com

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