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*In Search Of The Highest Truth – Adventures in Yoga Philosophy* by Hari-kirtana das  
**Teacher's Guide**

**Introduction:**

The primary purpose of this Teacher's Guide is to give teachers and training program leaders ideas about how to help students understand, assimilate, and apply the philosophical ideas presented in *In Search Of The Highest Truth – Adventures in Yoga Philosophy*.

The power of any philosophy may be measured by the degree to which it inspires and supports us on a transformative journey that draws from our own unique experience. Yoga philosophy provides us with a rich and dynamic perspective from which to evaluate different possibilities along the course of that journey.

As often as not, students tell me that even after completing a 200-hour Yoga Teacher Training program they don't feel confident in articulating core concepts of yoga philosophy. For many, the reason their grasp on the basic tenets of yoga philosophy is shaky is because they received a lot of new information without a framework for evaluating and applying that information. This is often a source of some distress because most serious practitioners have experienced major shifts in consciousness as a result of their practice and are highly motivated to share this knowledge with others.

My hope is that this Teacher's Guide will provide the kind of framework needed to help students evaluate and internalize concepts of yoga philosophy to the degree that they will be able to confidently share their personal realizations about the experience of yoga in their own voice.

The structure of this workbook provides a means to go deeper into each chapter of *In Search Of The Highest Truth* by providing a review of key concepts, topics and questions for discussion, group exercises, a topic for individual contemplation, and an experiment for individual discovery. Although many of the exercises were designed to work in a group setting, they are equally transformative for those who are using the workbook for individual study.

People come to yoga philosophy with wildly different backgrounds and learning styles. Many have never studied philosophy of any kind. No matter what your experience level as a teacher or a student, I trust that users of this workbook will discover the numerous applications of yoga's timeless wisdom to life in the modern world and feel empowered to share that wisdom with the confidence that comes from direct perception by virtue of personal experience.

## **Prologue:**

### Key Concepts

- Yoga is both a joyful and a scientific process.
- The ultimate goal of yoga is spiritual awakening.
- Yoga offers practical solutions to life's inherent problems.
- One is more likely to gain a deeper understanding of yoga by looking at the modern world through the lens of yoga than by looking at yoga through the lens of the modern world.
- Faith and humility are the mandatory pre-requisites for the acquisition of knowledge.
- In yoga philosophy, faith is not blind; faith is accompanied by knowledge and reason.

### Questions For Group Discussion

- What is the value in learning about yoga philosophy?
- What motivates people to search for truth?
- Is there such a thing as one, objective 'Absolute Truth'?

If so,

- Would you know it when you saw it?
- How might one recognize it?
- Would one Absolute Truth necessarily negate all other truths or might there be other truths that do not contradict or conflict with the one Absolute Truth?

If not,

- Are all 'truths' equally valid?
- Are facts 'true' if they are not part of a shared conception of reality?
- Are feelings as valid as facts?

### Group Exercise

Collaborate on developing an answer to the question, "How would you describe the greatest thing or the 'Highest Truth' that you can conceive of?" Consider that this 'Highest Truth' can be a person, a place, a thing, or a combination of person, place, and thing.

## Individual Contemplation

Do you trust your senses to deliver an accurate perception of reality?

Think of a time when you discovered that something you thought was true was actually false or that something you thought was false was actually true: what effect did that have on you?

## Individual Experiment

Write a brief description of your idea of 'Truth' and your current relationship with that idea. Then write a brief description of what your relationship with your current conception of 'Truth' has been at different points in your life. Finally, write a brief description of what you think your relationship with your current conception of 'Truth' might be in the future.

## **Chapter One – Seeing Through the Eyes of Yoga**

### Key Concepts

- A working definition of yoga philosophy: the systematic study of the true nature of one's being, of the mechanics of illusion and the process by which consciousness may be liberated from illusion, of the nature of ultimate reality, and of the experience of harmony with ultimate reality.
- Yoga philosophy begins with the proposition that we are eternal spiritual beings currently experiencing consciousness through the medium of a temporary material body: that we are not the temporary material bodies we currently inhabit.
- "Reality" in yoga philosophy is comprised of three qualities: eternality, knowledge, and bliss.
- The opposite of a material body or form is a spiritual body or form. "Spiritual" does not necessarily mean "formless".
- The three qualities of material nature (the *gunas*) are manifest in the material world as five obvious material elements and three subtle material elements. The obvious material elements are solids, liquids, radiant energy, gases, and space (earth, water, fire, air, and ether). The subtle material elements are mind, intelligence and ego. Together, these eight elements make up the composition of a material body inhabited by a spiritual person, whose presence in the body is symptomized by consciousness.
- The intention of yoga is to solve the problem of death by awakening the practitioner to an awareness of their true, eternal nature.

### Question For Group Discussion

If you actually experienced yourself as an eternal spiritual being whose existence did not depend on having a body made of matter, how would that change your life?

### Group Exercise

Take the '*gunas*' test<sup>1</sup>: In each row, put a check mark next to your spontaneous response to each situation in the left-hand column. Then add up the check marks in each column. This will give you a composite score that indicates what mix of the qualities of material nature you're influenced by.

Without necessarily revealing individual answers to specific situations, discuss the implications of the results:

- What does the '*gunas*' test tell you about yourself? What does it tell you about other people?
- In what ways would seeing people and events through the lens of the '*gunas*' change the way you think about those events and how people respond to them?

### Individual Contemplation

How do you think the experience of having a body made of eternality, knowledge, and bliss would be different from having a body made of flesh, blood, and bones?

### Individual Experiment

Write out a definition of 'self-realization'. Then, beneath your definition, write a short list of problems you have in your life. Next, write out the way you think becoming self-realized might help solve each problem. Compare the process of becoming self-realized to the process you're currently using to address each particular problem. How are they different? How are they the same? Is there a way to combine the two into an integrated solution?

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<sup>1</sup> The '*Gunas*' test appears at the back of this Study Guide.

## **Chapter Two – Faith and Knowledge**

### Key Concepts

- The fundamental question shared by philosophy and theology is, ‘Why does evil exist / suffering occur?’
- Modern secular culture separates faith and knowledge. Traditional yoga philosophy unites faith and knowledge

### Questions For Group Discussion

Do you agree with the author’s proposition that knowledge is dependent on faith?

- If so, why?
- If not, why not?

### Group Exercise

How often do you act on faith rather than knowledge without realizing that that’s what you’re doing? For example: when crossing the street in front of a car that’s stopped at a ‘Stop’ sign or a red light, do you know the driver is not going to step on the accelerator or do you have faith that they’re not going to step on the accelerator? Make a list of all the times we act on faith rather than knowledge without really thinking about it.

### Individual Contemplation

What do you have faith in? Is your faith reasonable?

- If so, in what way is it reasonable?
- If not, why do you maintain this faith?

### Individual Experiment

Write a detailed statement describing a part of your life where you would like to have a higher level of faith than you do right now. Describe the current strength level of your faith. Then use your imagination to create a prototype of your self in an ideal state of faith in this part of your life. Lastly, write an affirmation that confirms your ideal state of faith as your present state of being. Recite this affirmation every morning for one week and use it whenever necessary to awaken the experience of faith. Take note of any meaningful experiences you have in connection with this experiment.

## Chapter Three – Cause and Effect

### Key Concepts

- Modern science assumes that the universe appears by pure chance for no particular reason; yoga philosophy assumes that the universe appears by design for specific reasons:
  - To facilitate the experience of life in the material world
  - To facilitate liberation from material consciousness
- The *Vedanta-sutras* describe the material world as a transformation of spiritual energy
- Non-duality and duality are reconciled by the theory of an inconceivable simultaneous oneness of and difference between the innumerable varieties of energy of which reality is composed and the source of all energies, analogous to sunshine and the sun; two distinct things, yet inseparable.
- The difference between science and philosophy is the difference between the questions, ‘How does something happen?’ and ‘Why does something happen?’

### Questions For Group Discussion

Can you find any similarities between the aims and methods of science and yoga?

- If so, what are they?
- If not, how are they different?

In what ways are our lives dedicated to the project of moving the universe into alignment with our desires?

Is it our natural position to be in the center of a universe that revolves around our desires?

- If so, why is this so, how does it work, and what result can we expect?
- If not, what *is* our natural position, why is this so, how does it work, and what result can we expect?

### Group Exercise

Make a list of three things that you have complete control over. Then, for every item on the list, make a list of three things you have no control over upon which the thing you have control over depends. Example:

- Thing I control: whether or not I walk across the room to get a glass of water

- Things I don't control: the law of gravity, the biomechanical system in my body that responds to my will to walk, the existence of water.

### Individual Contemplation

- If consciousness arises by pure chance and disappears forever when the body dies then what is the meaning of one's life?
- If consciousness exists for a reason and continues to exist after the body dies then what is the meaning of one's life?

## **Chapter Four – Yoga and Religion**

### Key Concepts

- The Sanskrit word *vidyā*, commonly translated as “knowledge,” indicates illumination or a projection of light (like the English word ‘video’). The word *avidyā*, usually translated as “ignorance,” indicates the absence of light, to be engulfed in darkness and thus unable to see.
- Yoga is not a religion: it's a technology for accessing religious experience. The words “yoga” and “religion” are synonyms.
- In traditional yoga philosophy, Ultimate Reality is understood to be composed of hierarchical states of being, truths, and energies. The sum total of all hierarchical truths plus the distinctive feature of being the cause of all subsequent truths is understood to be the Absolute Truth.

### Question For Group Discussion

How do you see the relationship between yoga and religion? Are they mutually reinforcing, mutually exclusive, or some combination of the two?

### Group Exercise

Collaborate on developing an answer to the question, “If you could see, directly or indirectly, the presence of the Supreme Soul (*Paramatma*) within everyone's heart, how would that change how you think about or act toward other people? Consider the following categories of people:

- Your parents
- Your children (if any)
- Your pets (if any)
- Friends

- Enemies
- Random strangers
- Farm animals
- Wild animals
- Politicians
- Soldiers
- Saints
- Terrorists

### Individual Contemplation

Has yoga acted as a technology for accessing a 'religious' experience for you? If so, how? If not, how would you characterize the way in which yoga has affected you?

### Individual Experiment

Take two minutes every morning for one week to visualize opening a door to your heart and seeing the *Paramatma*, the Supreme Person, residing there. Contemplate the idea that the *Paramatma* has always been in your heart and will always be in your heart, accompanying you, without judgment, as your ever well-wisher, wherever you go, forever. During your daily activities, return to this thought whenever you find yourself judging yourself harshly or when feelings of emptiness or self-doubt arise. Try to keep a record of such incidences and how this remembrance changes your experience.

## **Chapter Five – Finding Hidden Treasure**

### Key Concepts

- In Sanskrit, the word *Veda* means “knowledge” and *anta* means “the end” or “conclusion.” Thus, *Vedānta* means “the ultimate conclusion of knowledge.” The word *Vedānta* is often used as shorthand for one school of *Vedānta* philosophy, namely *Advaita Vedānta*, the school of absolute non-dualism. There are actually several different schools of *Vedānta*.
- One may find value in both figurative and literal interpretations of yoga wisdom texts: sometimes the text is offering an allegory, sometimes the text means exactly what it says, and sometimes a passage contains value in both metaphorical and literal interpretations.
- It's helpful to have a teacher who is living in accordance with the teachings of a text in order for one to fully appreciate the teachings of that text. According



to the yoga tradition itself, having such a teacher is required if one is to enter fully into the teachings of yoga.

### Questions For Group Discussion

- In his *Yoga-sūtras*, Patañjali says that the perfection of *samadhi* is achieved by surrender to *Isvara*: what does he mean by that? What is *samadhi*?<sup>2</sup>
- In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says that he illuminates a path that leads specifically to himself for those who associate with him through offerings of loving devotion: what does he mean by that? What are ‘offerings of loving devotion’?<sup>3</sup>

### Group Exercise

Collaborate on developing a list of practical activities that exemplify surrender to *Isvara* or devotional offerings to Kṛṣṇa.

### Individual Contemplation

In *Bhagavad-gītā* verse 10.8, Krishna tells Arjuna,

*“I am the source of all. Everything emanates from me. Those who are wise, whose knowledge is perfect, serve me with devotion and worship me with all their heart.”*

Do you think it’s possible for one specific person to be the original source of everything? What would it take for you to accept Kṛṣṇa’s explanation of himself literally rather than look for an indirect interpretation of this verse?

### Individual Experiment

Choose a book of traditional yoga wisdom such as the *Yoga-sutras* or the *Bhagavad-gita* and engage in 30 minutes of ‘contemplative’ reading.

The goal of contemplative reading is to allow the text to affect us rather than to absorb information. It’s about associating with the author, listening carefully to the author’s message, and letting the author’s words penetrate deeply into the core of our consciousness.

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<sup>2</sup> Something to consider: Edwin Bryant defines *samadhi* as ‘meditative absorption’ in his translation of the *Yoga-sūtras*. A state of bliss, often thought of as the meaning of *samadhi*, is more properly understood as a symptom of *samadhi*.

<sup>3</sup> See *Bhagavad-gītā* verses 9.26-27 as a reference.

Here's how to do it: Take a moment to set an intention of reading with an attitude of humility and gratitude. Then read through the verses and commentaries slowly, with rapt attention, until a word, a phrase, or an idea captures your attention. Repeat the significant phrase to your self a few times to help your intelligence assimilate the message that got your attention. Then write your thoughts down without editing yourself or stopping – just keep your writing instrument moving. Use a pen and paper rather than an electronic device. Stay with this message or idea until it releases you, and then continue your deliberate and attentive reading until another point captures your attention. Repeat the process as many times as you feel inspired during your 30-minutes of reading.

## **Chapter Six – A Very Brief History of Yoga Philosophy**

### Key Concepts

- Yoga originally appears within Vedic culture; Buddhism developed outside of Vedic culture. Strictly speaking, Buddhism and Vedic yoga are contrary schools of thought, not complimentary ones, as is commonly assumed in modern yoga.
- Śaṅkara's school of absolute non-dualism (*Advaita Vedānta*) appears as a response to Buddhism's rejection of the Vedas. Prior to Buddhism, the *Upaniṣads* featured both dualistic and non-dualistic, or personal and impersonal, descriptions of the Absolute Truth.
- Śrī Caitanya's school of inconceivable, simultaneous oneness and difference (*achintyabhedabheda-tattva*) is a synthesis of non-dualism and dualism that describes a qualitative oneness of *ātman* with *Brahman* in terms of spiritual essence, but a quantitative difference between them in terms of power, scope, and cognition.

### Questions For Group Discussion

Compare and contrast the messages of Buddhism and Yoga, as far as you know them: where do they correspond and where do they conflict?

Do all paths lead to the same destination?

### Individual Contemplation

Which makes sense for you or just feels right to you:

- The Highest Truth has no name(s), form(s), qualities, activities, or relationships

- The Highest Truth has unlimited names, forms, qualities, activities, and relationships

### Individual Experiments

According to the *Kali-santaraṇa Upaniṣad*, the Hare Krishna mantra is the most effective mantra to chant in order to counteract the negative impact of *Kali-yuga*, the current season of time that's characterized by industrialization, hypocrisy, and conflict. Integrate this mantra into your daily meditation practice in whatever way seems natural to you for one month. Take note of the effect, if any, that chanting this mantra has on your consciousness:

*Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna – Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare*  
*Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma – Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare*

## **Chapter Seven – Yoga, the Vedas, and Hinduism**

### Key Concepts

- The Vedic yoga tradition recommends that the best way to learn yoga philosophy is by hearing about it from a qualified teacher.
- The translation of the phrase *Bhagavad-gītā* is “the song of God” or “the song of the Blessed Lord”. The intention of the *Bhagavad-gītā* is to show us how the world looks from God’s point of view.
- The word ‘Hindu’ is derived from a Persian word used as a geographic reference. It is not a Sanskrit word and does not appear anywhere in the Vedas. The *Bhagavad-gītā* predates the ethnic, national, and religious identity we call “Hinduism” by thousands of years.
- The project of yoga in the Vedic tradition is one of uncovering our eternal, spiritual identity. As such, yoga transcends all temporary material designations such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, social class, etc.

### Questions For Group Discussion

If we borrow aspects of Hindu culture when we practice and teach yoga in the west, how can we de-colonize our practice and our teaching? Is it necessary or desirable to de-colonize our practice / teaching? What do we mean by ‘de-colonize’?

What approaches or best practices should one adopt in order to be a teacher or student of yoga rather than an appropriator of Hindu culture?

How can we create a style of Western Yoga that is neither a rip-off of Indian culture nor consumer-culture sell-out? Is it possible to develop a style or presentation of yoga that is authentically western and yet still directs the practitioner toward transcendence in accordance with the traditional intention of yoga?

### Group Exercises

Make three columns. Label the first column 'Indian Yoga' and the third column 'Western Yoga'. Then label the second column 'Both'. Then, list the characteristics for each one: what makes 'Indian Yoga' Indian, 'Western Yoga' western, and what characteristics do they share?

Make a list of ethical and egalitarian interactions with the yoga tradition that are not informed by colonialism and consumerism.

### Individual Contemplation

In what ways are you invested in aspects of your identity that yoga philosophy calls *upadhi-s*, temporary material designations? How deeply invested in these changeable conceptions of identity are you? Are these conceptions of your identity valid? If so, in what way are they valid? If not, what would you need to do in order to develop a sense of constructive detachment from these identities? Consider the possibility that *upadhi-s* may have both valid and invalid aspects, that this is not necessarily an either/or situation.

### Individual Experiments

Think of two words that describe who you are (the first two words you think of are usually the right words). Then, think of the opposite of those two words. Then, try to imagine yourself as being like this opposite phrase rather than as the first two words you thought of.

Remember what you were like 10 years ago. Think of how different you are now from how you were 10 years ago. Try to imagine yourself as you will be 10 years from now. Will you be as different from the way you currently are 10 years from now as you are currently different from the way you were 10 years ago?

## Chapter Eight – Five Functions of Yoga Philosophy

### Key Concepts

- Yoga philosophy performs five functions:
  1. Metaphysical function: reveals the divine nature of the world.
  2. Cosmological function: provides a map of the world and your position in it
  3. Sociological function: provides ethics and social structure
  4. Psychological function: reveals the means to sustainable happiness
  5. Illuminative function: provides the means to recreate the revelatory experiences of self-realized yogis
- Knowing the difference between a changeless principle and a variable principle is the art of understanding how to practically apply the principles of yoga in order to achieve the experience of yoga.

### Question For Group Discussion

Do you think that yoga actually performs these functions? Do you experience these five functions in your yoga practice? If so, how? If not, why not?

### Group Exercise

For each function, come up with a list of reasons why the function matters or what's significant about it, how the function works, and practical examples of what the result of the function is.

### Individual Contemplation

Which of these functions is the most meaningful to you in your practice? Which is the least meaningful? Consider why these two functions are the most and least meaningful respectively.

### Individual Experiment

Match each function to each day of the standard workweek as follows:

Monday – Metaphysical Function

Tuesday – Cosmological Function

Wednesday – Sociological Function

Thursday – Psychological Function

Friday – Illuminative Function

Make a commitment to look for a manifestation of each function on its assigned day. For example, on Monday, make a conscious effort to see the spiritual nature of the material world and consider if – and, if so, how – yoga helps you to see in this way. On Tuesday, look for an indication of where you are physically, emotionally, and spiritually in relationship to where you want to be, etc., referencing your experience of yoga once again. Use each day as an opportunity to try to experience each function of yoga, both on and off your yoga mat.

## **Chapter Nine – Socio-economic Relationships**

### Key Concepts

- Traditional yoga culture has four social divisions:
  1. *Brāhmaṇa*: Spiritually enlightened intellectuals (head of the social body)
  2. *Kṣatriyas*: Leaders and warriors (arms and chest of the social body)
  3. *Vaiśyas*: Entrepreneurs and merchants (belly of the social body)
  4. *Śūdras*: artists, artisans, and manual laborers (legs of the social body)

### Questions For Group Discussion

- Do these social divisions just ‘naturally’ occur, are they ordained by God, or are they social constructs?
- Are there any other social divisions that the Vedic social system leaves out?
- The Vedic social system, called *varna*, places people in social positions based on their natural aptitudes and inclinations. How is this different from the caste system?
- Can someone be in more than one social division?

### Group Exercise

Take five minutes to have everyone think of four people they know, one for each social division, and write down who they are, what they do, and what social division they belong to. Then engage everyone in discussion: each participant chooses one person on their list and explains who they are, what they do, and what social division they belong to.

Make a list of public figures who are working in one social division but might have been better suited to another social division.

## Individual Contemplation

Do you see yourself fitting into one of these social divisions? If so, which one? Why? Do you fit into more than one?

## Individual Experiment

Write down a list of your natural aptitudes and the kinds of work or activities you really enjoy doing. Write out a list of the ways you can engage in your natural aptitudes and inclinations as an integral part of your yoga practice. Compare the results of your experiment with the results of your contemplation.

## **Chapter Ten – Gurus and Teachers**

### Key Concepts

- The primary qualification for someone to be a guru is that they are in control of their senses rather than under the control of their senses.
- One who sees the Truth has the ability to act as a transparent medium through which others can see the same Truth.

### Questions For Group Discussion

- Consider these verses from the Bhagavad-gita (Bg 2.54-57):

Arjuna said: “O Kṛṣṇa, what are the symptoms of one whose consciousness is thus merged in transcendence? How does he speak, and what is his language? How does he sit, and how does he walk?”

The Blessed Lord said: “When one is free from all varieties of material desires that arise from the mind and, with a purified mind, finds satisfaction in the self alone, then such a person is understood to be in a state of transcendental consciousness. One whose mind is free from attachment, fear, and anger, who is undisturbed by the arrival of the miseries of material life nor euphoric at the arrival of causes for happiness, is called a sage of steady mind. One who, in all circumstances, remains unfazed by whatever fortune or misfortune that comes their way, neither celebrating nor scorning it, is firmly fixed in perfect knowledge.”

  - Have you ever met anyone like this?
  - Do you think it’s possible for someone to genuinely be like this?
  - Would you want to learn about yoga from someone like this?
- What’s the difference between a guru / disciple relationship and a teacher / student relationship?

- What elements of a good teacher / student relationship might carry over into a good guru/ disciple relationship?
- Whether a teacher likes it or not, some yoga students attribute or project an inherent authority like that of a guru onto yoga teachers. For those who teach or aspire to teach yoga: what are some resolutions you can make for yourself right now that will guide you through situations when a student sees you as having guru-like authority?

### Group Exercise

Consider the pros and cons of having a guru: use the following graphic to create a list of potential benefits, potential negatives, and contingencies: what would have to be true in order for the benefit to be gained or for the negative to come to pass.

Pros	Cons	Contingencies for Pros or Cons

### Individual Contemplation

Do you think you would ever want to have a guru? If so, why? What would you hope to get out of such a relationship? If not, why not?

## **Chapter Eleven – Ethical Imperatives**

### Key Concepts

- Deontology: ethics are derived from an absolute authority existing outside of one’s self.
- Consequentialism: ethics are determined by the projected outcome of a course of action (judge a thing by its result)
- Patañjali’s system of yoga begins with ethics that are deemed mandatory and universal: applicable in all times, places, and circumstances.
- Ethics in yoga are primarily deontological: the results are not as important as the principle.



- According to yoga philosophy, we are enjoined to do the right thing because it's the right thing to do without attachment to the results.
- The reason for observing the ethical imperatives of yoga is for the sake of purifying our consciousness.

### Questions For Group Discussion

- Do you have to aspire to a harm-free lifestyle in order to do yoga?
- Do you have to care for your self before you can have compassion for others?
- What are some teachings from the yoga tradition that inspire you to feel and practice compassion for others?
- For yoga teachers: how does teaching methodology – cueing, demo-ing, hands-on adjustments and assists, etc. – relate to the ethical directive to cause no harm?

### Group Exercise

Using the 'Values' chart at the back of the workbook, select a cause from the "Fields of Action" list and then use the following graphic to create a set of tactics within each of the four 'Activism Strategies' that corresponds to the list of yoga's 'Ethical Imperatives'.

### Individual Contemplation

How do you decide what's right and what's wrong?

### Individual Experiment

At the beginning of a week, assess the state of your consciousness. Then choose one of the ethical imperatives of yoga and make a firm commitment to do everything you can to honor that ethical imperative for the entire week. Make a note anytime you feel that you successfully honored that ethical imperative in a situation where you otherwise might not have. Take note of anytime you feel that you didn't fully honor your commitment but could have. At the end of the week, assess the state of your consciousness. Compare your assessment at the end of the week to your assessment at the beginning of the week. What, if anything, changed?

## Chapter Twelve – Destiny, Free Will, and Pink Floyd

### Key Concepts

- Our physical condition, psychological disposition, cultural references, and extended environment are all manifestations of a combination of the *gunas*; the three qualities of material nature. ‘Illusion’ or ‘ignorance’ in yoga means to identify with a particular combination of *gunas* rather than with our pure consciousness beyond the *gunas*.
- Equating karma with justice, the idea that we get what we deserve, does not negate the possibility that one can be the victim of injustice.
- Maintaining a state of equanimity in all circumstances is one of the most challenging aspects of yoga.
- As far as yoga is concerned, reality is what it is; we don’t create our own realities: we create our own conceptions of reality.
- Destiny is what happens to us; free will is how we respond to what happens to us.

### Question For Group Discussion

- What are the pros and cons of everyone living according to their own ‘personal truth’?
- What are the pros and cons of everyone living according to a shared conception of an objective reality?
- Are these two options mutually exclusive or is there any way for both to be accommodated?
- Which is more conducive to a peaceful society: everyone creating his or her own reality or everyone agreeing to the existence of an objective reality?

### Individual Contemplation

Which would you rather receive: justice or mercy?

Would your answer change if you knew that all other beings would receive the same choice that you made?

### Individual Experiment

Think of one aspect of your destiny that you would like to find a better response to. Take note of how you’ve responded to this aspect of your destiny thus far. Consider other possible responses without discounting them as unrealistic or out of character or for any reason, including a response that aligns you with the idea of *isvara-pranidhana* – surrendering to Divine will. Look for opportunities to respond to your destiny differently than you have in the past. Take note of

how making a conscious effort to engage your free will in a different way from before is affecting your relationship with your destiny.

## **Chapter Thirteen – Karma and Samsara**

### Key Concepts

- *Karma* is action that creates future births. *Samsāra* is the cycle of repeated birth and death.
- The concepts of an eternal *ātma*, or soul, action that creates future births, and a cycle of repeated birth and death all go together. You can't separate them because all three must be present in order for the others to make sense.
- Yoga thinks of evolution in terms of the evolution of qualities of consciousness that takes you to different life forms.
- According to yoga philosophy, we can take birth as any kind of life form.

### Question For Group Discussion

Is there a plausible explanation, other than karma, for why one person is born into very fortunate circumstances and another person is born into very unfortunate circumstances?

If it's not a reaction to actions performed in previous lives, what other possible explanations are there?

Does accepting the concepts of *karma* and *samsāra* necessarily change how one looks at and treats other beings? If so, how? If not, why not?

### Group Exercise

How does thinking that a dog is a person in a dog body change how we think about and act toward dogs? How about cats? Elephants? Insects? Cows? Chickens? Other life forms?

### Individual Contemplation

What would you like your next life to be like? What do you think you need to do in order to ensure that your next life is the life you really want to have?

### Individual Experiment

Make a commitment to consciously delay reacting to the next unexpected event in your life in order to give yourself time to think about all the different ways you

can respond to this event. Consider the future effect of each possible response for yourself and for others, and then choose how to respond. Take note of how the qualities of material nature that influence you expand or constrain your possible responses.

Use good judgment to make exceptions to your commitment to delay reacting, such as when a friend, relative, or loved one presents you with a pleasant surprise or tells you that something tragic has happened to them.

## **Chapter Fourteen – Modernity, Duality, and Non-duality**

### Key Concepts

- The understanding that consciousness exists independently of matter versus the understanding that consciousness is a product of matter is the essential tension between traditional yoga philosophy and Modernism / Post-modernism.
- The idea of a meta-physical reality beyond the physical reality of our daily experience is shared by both dualistic and non-dualistic schools of yoga philosophy
- Yoga philosophies (schools of *Vedanta*) that propose a dualistic conception or that synthesize dualistic and non-dualistic conceptions of ultimate reality accept the physical world as real but illusory in the sense that the material world is understood to be a transformation of spiritual energy.
- The non-dualistic yoga philosophy of Sankara proposes that the world only appears to exist as an ‘illusory superimposition’ on reality (*Brahman*) but has no factual existence – similar to Voidism in Buddhist philosophy.

### Questions For Group Discussion

- Are the underlying assumptions that traditional yoga and modern culture make about the relationship of consciousness and matter mutually exclusive or is there some way to reconcile them?
- If they can be reconciled, how? If they can’t, which way of understanding the relationship between consciousness and matter makes the most sense?
- Assuming for the sake of discussion that, in reality, I am you and you are me and we are all one:
  - Who is experiencing the illusion that we are all distinct individuals?
  - Can the One be under the influence of an illusion that makes the One believe it is many?

- Where does such an illusion come from / how does such an illusion come into being?

### Individual Contemplation

- Can a physical object, such as a body made of matter, produce a metaphysical condition, such as consciousness?
- Can a metaphysical condition, such as consciousness, produce a physical object, such as a body made of matter?

### Individual Experiment

Using your own descriptive language, write out your personal philosophy of life in a single paragraph. For example, if you're a Christian or an Atheist, don't just write 'I'm a Christian' or 'I'm an Atheist'; write what it means to be a Christian or an Atheist or whatever it is that you consider yourself to be.

Next, write out the reasoning for your philosophy: explain why your philosophy or belief system makes sense to you.

Finally, write a single paragraph that describes how your philosophy positions you to be a recipient of knowledge about who you really are.

## **Chapter Fifteen – The Highest Truth**

### Key Concepts

- In yoga philosophy, knowledge of the highest truth begins with the understanding that we are not our material bodies; that we are eternal spiritual beings having a temporary material experience.
- Yoga does not embrace the idea of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).
- The highest truth is inherently joined to our status as a spiritual person engaged in spiritual relationships with other people.
- Just as we are conscious of our own subjective experience, reality itself is conscious of its own subjective experience: as we are all unique persons participating in reality then reality itself is the ultimate unique person experiencing all of reality.

### Question For Group Discussion

If the highest truth is reality distinguished from illusion for the benefit of all, how does yoga help us make this distinction? How does making the distinction between reality and illusion benefit anyone?

### Individual Contemplation

Can you conceive of anything greater than a person who is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and capable of unlimited love? A person who loves us unlimitedly, and who enthusiastically invites us to participate in a relationship of unlimited love?

Is it reasonable to believe that there might be such a person?

‘The *Gunās* Test’ – a self-assessment in terms of the three qualities of material nature, appears on the following page.

The worksheet for linking yogic values and ethics to personal observances and social action is on the last page.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Mode of goodness</b>	<b>Mode of passion</b>	<b>Mode of ignorance</b>
I like to wake up	as early as possible	just in time to get to work	as late as possible
When I wake up, I'm	alert and happy	anxious about what the day will bring	grumpy and sluggish
The first thing I want in the morning is	to do yoga and/or meditation	coffee	to go back to sleep
I usually look at my e-mail and social media	after breakfast and some time to get grounded	immediately	whatever
My heroes are people who	Engage in selfless work for others	Have accomplished great achievements	have gotten away with doings things they shouldn't
I like to eat	Simple, wholesome, and easy to make	Spicy and sweet and gives immediate pleasure to the senses	Leftovers, warm beer and cold pizza, meat
Sometimes you have to	do things just because it's your duty to do it without any expectation of reward	take pride in your own accomplishments	avoid doing things when there's nothing in it for you
The best way to learn something is to	hear from someone who has knowledge about the subject	Develop lots of different theories and test them to see which one works	why bother: I already know everything.
The one thing I can't tolerate is	the suffering of others	people who don't know how to drive	people who are luckier than I am
When someone disagrees with me I want to	consider their point of view and, if I still disagree, respectfully reject it.	argue with them until they realize that I'm right	punch them in the head
At 4:20 in the afternoon I'm thinking about	Whatever happens to be occupying this moment in my day	How much I still have to do and how I'm going to do it	getting high
If I could live anywhere I wanted I'd live in	a peaceful place in the country, near trees	in the city, downtown where the action is	Las Vegas
In an emergency, my priority is to	control my mind and keep a clear head	protect myself and those I care about	wish it would go away

### SCORE

VALUES	ETHICAL and BEHAVIORAL GUIDELINES	ATTITUDE / INWARD-TURNING ACTION	STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL ACTION (ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD)			FIELDS OF ACTION	
<b>Austerity</b>	simplicity; renunciation of gratuitous materialism; refrainment from stealing (asteya); control of the senses; sobriety	detachment ( <i>vairagya</i> ), contentment ( <i>santos</i> )	<b>Service</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>	<b>Direct Action (Confrontation)</b>	<b>Non-cooperation</b>	environmentalism, humanitarian aid, access to health care, civil liberties, LGBTQ, rights, human rights, animal rights, education, child welfare, racial discrimination, equal economic opportunity, wealth distribution, drug addiction, capitalism / consumerism, tax reform, taxation without representation, nationalism, racism, sexism, freedom of religion, spiritual education (dissemination of transcendental knowledge), etc.
<b>Purity</b>	maintain virtuous intentions; renunciation of ulterior motives for profit, fame, etc.; control of sexual energy (brahmacharya)	cleanliness of body, purity of thought ( <i>sauci</i> )	<b>Service</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>	<b>Direct Action (Confrontation)</b>	<b>Non-cooperation</b>	
<b>Mercy</b>	living in such a way as to not harm any living being ( <i>ahimsa</i> ); compassion, kindness, generosity	contemplation of the spiritual equality of all beings ( <i>sadvivaya</i> )	<b>Service</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>	<b>Direct Action (Confrontation)</b>	<b>Non-cooperation</b>	
<b>Truthfulness</b>	honesty; bringing thoughts and words into direct correspondence with facts; responding honestly to inquiries from others; refraining from gambling / speculative investments	endeavor to distinguish reality from illusion ( <i>svadhyaya</i> )	<b>Service</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>	<b>Direct Action (Confrontation)</b>	<b>Non-cooperation</b>	
<b>Devotion</b>	make all actions an offering or a sacrifice for the Highest Truth you can conceive of; set aside time every day to hear about, glorify, and request the opportunity to serve God	concentration, meditation, complete absorption ( <i>ahara</i> ), <i>dhya</i> , <i>samadhi</i> ; <i>sanyama</i> )	<b>Service</b>	<b>Advocacy</b>	<b>Direct Action (Confrontation)</b>	<b>Non-cooperation</b>	