16. Yoga and the Liberation of the Eternal Self
Alan Daboin

"O son of Kunti (Arjuna), whatever state of being a man remembers while leaving his body at the time of death, to that state alone he enters due to his ever persistence in it."
Bhagavad Gita (8.6)

Introduction
Yoga is often seen as a modern, accessible, and trendy way to maintain one's fitness and health. However, to many of its instructors and practitioners it is much more than that – something akin to a way of life. This should not be too surprising, for, if one hearkens to its earliest Indian manifestations, the practice and purpose of yoga have long been tied to metaphysical, existential, and ethical considerations regarding both the nature and significance of the self (*atman* in Sanskrit) and its greater relation to the cosmos, or reality proper. Even if it is true that, in the secular West, many aspects of yoga's historically profound spiritual dimensions often tend to be minimised or hidden from view, it nonetheless holds that even the smallest details and idiosyncrasies behind a series of given poses (*asana*), breath control techniques (*pranayama*), or meditative practices, are likely to be rooted in the wisdom of traditional Asian philosophical and religious thought, other influences notwithstanding.

Indeed, one can preliminarily note that the aim of yoga in general, whether ancient or modern, is to serve as a pathway to self-realisation of a kind linked to the idea that one can break free from the cycle of rebirth and death (*samsara*) that living beings partake in, as per the great ancient religions of India. This notion of self-realisation is deeply associated with the famous law of *karma,* or action, which holds that some form of cosmic balance holds between all actions and their consequences, which some might simplify as a version of the idea that what goes around, comes around. To effect said break or release, that is, to attain liberation, or *moksha*, also known as *mukti* (or *nirvana* in more Buddhist contexts), requires being able to fully detach oneself from, or avoid getting mired and enmeshed in those worldly affairs and concerns which we tend to believe to be key in shaping and defining our lives and our senses of identity and purpose, whether for good or bad, but which only serve to keep us in the dark about who one truly is and what our larger connection to reality should consist in.

In an important sense, then, yoga is thus most properly seen as what Christy Turlington refers to as a "life-practice" (2002, p. 9). Yoga, one can say, is life-practice in the fullest sense of the phrase too, for it also prepares one to confront those final moments before death in a way that allows one to overcome death once and for all, rather than continue to succumb to it, for this is what is implied in the idea that the cycle of rebirth and death can in fact be broken.

Considering the present collection's subject matter, which treats the idea of last words, in what follows, the transformative potential of yogic practice will be primarily examined through the lens of its enduring connection to the timeless teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita,* or "Song of God." This Hindu scripture is probably the most important text in the history of yoga, broadly understood, and it presents one with a unique and profoundly influential understanding of the interplay between life, death, and the eternity of the self. In so doing, it offers rather detailed prescriptions regarding how to best carry out the difficult balancing act otherwise known as living life, something which here includes the art of dying, for it even incorporates discussions on what one should be thinking about or uttering right before one's bodily death.

Indeed, assuming one is able express, or even think, about anything, in the moments before one's death, the *Bhagavad Gita* stunningly claims at one point that one's final words, or final thoughts, at the time of death – or during one's *antakala* – can determine whether one ultimately died without having understood who one truly was, or whether, on the contrary, one has achieved the eternal bliss, or *ānanda*, which comes hand in hand with that deepest form of self-discovery whereby one is finally able to recognise and align oneself with who one truly is, one's eternal dimension, and what one's broader relation to the cosmos or reality consists in.

Apart from all this, the question of the relationship between yoga and last words is especially compelling to examine when considering yoga's unique perspectives on the value of stillness and silence, as well as on the significance of certain sounds or utterances often associated with speech, such as chants and mantras, as exemplified by the importance of the sacred and resonant *om* syllable. Even though, as Turlington notes, a mantra can sometimes be chanted silently within the mind too (2002, p. 99), this all invites further examination into the implications it might have for the value of last words—in particular, for what they should embody, or in determining whether one should aim, instead, to refrain from speaking at all before death. These considerations raise additional questions about the relative importance of one's last thoughts, which remain private, as

opposed to last words, which are typically expressed outwardly and communicated or communicable to others.

What Exactly is Meant by Yoga?

A notable challenge for scholars addressing yogic philosophy, or yoga in any broad sense, concerns its extensive and multifaceted history. Yoga, as a practice or set of practices that in some version or other dates back multiple millennia, has naturally evolved in countless fashions and taken on various forms, some of which can be said to hardly resemble one another, at least on the surface. Such diversity is not merely the result of the passing of time, for the concept of yoga in general has long been understood in a flexible way, apart from when it has referred to a specific school of thought in the history of Indian philosophy. Indeed, the idea that there are in fact various possible approaches to yoga has long been taken for granted, as already seen in those central scriptures and texts which have played a major role in systematising its practices, or giving them a foundation, which includes the *Bhagavad Gita*. At times, yoga in this broader sense might look like either an intellectual, contemplative, or physical exercise of sorts, at others it might look like a practical framework for ethical behaviour, and at others it might even look like a traditional ritualistic or devotional religious practice. Often, it is a mix of all or some of these, with differences of emphasis depending on what one values the most.

Occasionally, and quite unlike what any fitness regime would purport to do, the way yoga's effects are described might even give the appearance that something quasi-mystical is involved that goes beyond simply following whatever instructions one is working with. This would apply in the case of genuine and successful yogic practice, at least judging by how the yogi's ideal spiritual journey is often described in any number of yogic texts, involving as this does a spiritual ascent of some kind whereby, once anything connected to the individual ego has been tamed or purged, things will culminate in what is referred to as a union with the divine, or with that divine reality known as *brahman*.

This is seen, for instance, in how the *Bhagavad Gita* describes the nature and source of that beatific state of happiness and illumination that yoga leads to in the best of cases: "One whose happiness is within, whose contentment is within, similarly whose illumination is only within, that yogi, becoming one with *Brahman*, attains eternal freedom in *Brahman*" (5.24).[208] The *Bhagavad Gita* is rather explicit in

[208] References to the *Bhagavad Gita*, in chapter and verse, come from the recent translation and commentary by Keya Maitra, published under the title *Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita: A Contemporary Introduction.*

connecting the attainment of self-realisation with the achievement of union with the divine in similar verses like the following:

> For perfect happiness comes to the yogi whose mind has become tranquil, whose passion is calmed, who is without blemish, and has become one with *Brahman*.
> Thus devoting himself to *yoga* constantly, the yogi, freed from blemishes, easily attains contact with *Brahman*, which is infinite joy.
> He, whose self is established in *yoga*, who sees sameness in all things, sees himself as abiding in all creatures and all creatures in himself (6.27-29).

In the end, self-realisation and realising *brahman* are essentially two sides of the same coin,[209] and this to the point that yoga should be seen as the most important activity a human being can possibly engage in.

The *Bhagavad Gita* delineates three principal forms of yoga which can serve as paths to facilitate this union with the divine, or divine reality, each one of which has also been emphasised or favoured to different degrees by different movements and schools of thought throughout yoga's history, and which continue to be influential in shaping much of contemporary practice. More specifically, there is *karma-yoga*, which represents the path of selfless action, *bhakti-yoga*, or the path of devotion, which is characterised by love and surrender to the divine, and *jnana-yoga*, the path of knowledge, which is more concerned with discernment and introspection.

It is important to emphasise that despite the inherent diversity of ways to do yoga, that there is still a fundamental unity among them in terms of their objectives. Ithamar Theodor underscores this in a discussion focusing on the mind's crucial role in linking the physical realm – including our bodies and senses – with the soul (at least when it comes to how this interplay is conceptualised in a text like the *Bhagavad Gita*). As he writes, "The various yoga systems all aspire to transition the practitioner from a state of worldly existence to an enlightened and liberated state. The practice primarily concentrates on the mind, which, in its unrestrained state, binds the soul to embodiment. Conversely, when the mind is restrained and made transparent, it facilitates the soul's liberation" (2010, p. 8). Indeed, one can

[209] This convergence with the divine can be seen as a dissolution into or even identification with the divine reality itself, depending on what philosophical school of thought one belongs to.

go as far as to claim that the essence of any form of yoga lies first and foremost in having some such objective and an ostensive way of getting there, be the actual specifics what they may.

Of course, even if yoga can unproblematically be carried out in vastly diverse ways, it is still important to acknowledge some of the main differences that have served to distinguish schools and approaches throughout its long history, especially as these often stem from philosophical disagreements on fundamental concepts that touch on the very meaning and nature of yoga's goal. Apart from issues concerning the differences in emphases that Buddhism and Jainism, the two great non-Hindu Indian religions which have long embraced yoga, haven given to their respective understandings thereof, from historically intractable intramural disagreements within Hindu philosophy have played a major role in this regard. Specifically, philosophical debates regarding the most basic metaphysical issues, such as how one should understand the nature of reality, or what the self's relation to reality consists in, gave rise very early on to a panoply of intellectual currents within Hindu philosophy. These, in turn, have served to shape the general direction and development of yogic theory and practice over much of the last two or so millennia.

To give but a flavour of the kinds of divisions and approaches that such philosophical differences have engendered, it is important to first note that what is nowadays called classical yoga is often seen as its own philosophical school of thought, and this under the general label of yoga. Indeed, yoga in this sense represents one of a select handful of important philosophical schools of thought, or systems (*darshans*) which flourished in India long ago. To get a sense of what used to be considered the implicit philosophy associated with yoga, one cannot avoid mentioning the *Yoga-sutras* attributed to Patanjali, a work which probably dates to well over two thousand years ago, and which features the famous eight limbs of yoga.[210]

What distinguished yoga as a school of thought in this context was primarily the way it promoted self-control of various kinds as the path to liberation, in contrast to more intellectual approaches which would value the acquisition of a certain

[210] The eight limbs are supposed to serve as a roadmap for self-realisation, which as we will see, is something that involves caring for all aspects of the body and mind. These are, specifically, *yama* (or interpersonal ethical behaviors), *niyama* (personal discipline-based practices), *asana* (poses or postures), *pranayama* (breath control exercises), *pratyahara* (sensory withdrawal to effect internal awareness), *dharana* (*concentration*), *dhyana* (meditation of the sort which consists in extended concentration on an object), and *samadhi* (transcending self-awareness and union with the divine) (*Yoga-sutras*, 2.29).

kind of knowledge instead. When viewed as a general philosophy, many of yoga's tenets are extremely close and often indistinguishable, however, from the separate dualistic philosophical tradition known as Samkhya. Specifically, the two principles which make up reality under this account, and which the yoga school accepts, are *purusha*, which is pure consciousness, or the transcendental and eternal self, and *prakriti*, which is a dynamic, creative energy or primal matter, which includes things like the mind itself (as this is but an aspect or mode of consciousness that is subject to change).

In particular, the understanding of liberation promoted by the *Yoga-sutras* is deeply tied to the idea that mastering the fluctuations of the mind, which is what self-control aims at, hinges on successfully discriminating between these two principles. This is because conflating *purusha* with *prakriti*, or failing to disassociate the latter from the former, leads to the collapse of our one's sense of individuality once it becomes identified with, or is seen to depend on, the transient aspects that otherwise define our existence, e.g., our body, emotions, and mind. To misidentify our true nature in that way, in turn, serves to breed all sorts of attachments, aversions, vices, and so on, which will only keep one trapped in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Properly discerning between *purusha* and *prakriti* thus serves to facilitate, and represents the other side of the coin to, the cultivation of that general attitude of equanimity or detachment which is needed to properly handle and mitigate the effects of worldly affairs. For instance, knowing how to deal with all the suffering inherent in transient existence, or with the meaning of events like death itself, requires a mindset which is clear about the self's true nature.

Of course, the assumption that all forms of yoga must be founded on the same ideas is not true *if* one also accepts the possibility that yoga might be compatible with views contrary to those promoted by Samkhya, like the non-dualistic philosophies of Shankara, the leading figure of the monistic Advaita Vedanta tradition, and Ramanuja, of the more qualified monistic tradition known as Vishishtadvaita, both of whose views have greatly shaped the development of yoga in different ways.[211] Shankara's Advaita Vedanta tradition, for instance, essentially equates liberation with the realisation that one's identity is only with the absolute reality of *brahman*, and this in a sense that implies there is no reality to anyone's individuality, which contradicts the Samkhya understanding of the self as an individual *purusha* that is distinct from *brahman*. Vishishtadvaita, on the other hand, does make room for the idea of individual existence on some level,

[211] Active during the eighth to ninth centuries, Shankara championed a *jnana-yoga*-oriented approach. Conversely, Ramanuja, active during the eleventh to twelfth centuries, emphasised the importance of *bhakti-yoga*.

albeit within the framework of an ontology that assumes completely dependence on *brahman* that still goes against Samkhya views of the self, reality, and liberation interplay in a way that cannot be considered trivial.

Ultimately, while it would be wrong to say such philosophical disagreements have led to some inevitable divorce between yoga's longstanding association with Samkhya, they have certainly helped foster a broader, more inclusive approach with respect to what kind of theory must ground the coherence and overall dynamics of yoga's general mechanism of action and how one should understand its vision of liberation, an open-endedness and receptivity to philosophical pluralism that has naturally affected its practice over the centuries. Interestingly, some of the more prominent schools of yoga today, which have mostly evolved over the last century or so, thus representing relatively recent developments in the history of yoga, have taken this foundational openness to new heights by incorporating and synthesising ideas that come not only from the different intellectual currents that have long defined the history of Indian philosophy's main fault lines, but historically unrelated and Western trends and sources of thought.

Without seeking to adjudicate the authenticity of all forms of yoga and without seeking to exclude or alienate serious practitioners of yoga in its various forms, for a discussion like this one, I thus find that the best definitions of yoga have to keep things somewhat open-ended, such as that offered by Edward Clark and Laurie A. Greene, who define it abstractly as "the study of the Self and its relation to 'reality'" (2022, p. 4). M.V. Nadkarni's view of yoga is even broader, simply defining it as "spiritual striving" (2017, p. 1). At the same time, it is rather noteworthy that the yoga most people probably think of when they hear the word today, a form of yoga which emphasises the body known as Hatha Yoga, represents a long tradition that might go as far back as two millennia. While today's Hatha Yoga may look very different from the one practised in ancient or mediaeval India, if one practises it with a mindset that goes beyond purely fitness or health-related aims, there is no good reason to see it as anything less than genuine. Indeed, considering Hatha Yoga's contemporary popularity and undeniable connection to the past, significant parts of the following discussion will be structured around how its main pillars, namely, asanas, *pranayama*, and meditation are supposed to help prepare one for death, to understand its meaning and to make sense of the *Bhagavad Gita*'s teaching on the implications of one's final words, or final thoughts.

Rebirth, Death, and the Eternal Nature of the Self

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, which belongs to the epic narrative of the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna, a warrior in the Kurukshetra War, confronts an existential dilemma. He is reluctant to engage in battle. This does not come from a place of cowardice or lack of skill but, rather, from deep ethical and moral concerns about killing relatives and acquaintances – a necessity imposed upon him by the conflict he finds himself involved in. The *Mahabharata* recounts a struggle between two factions of the same clan, and it is within this context that the *Bhagavad Gita* serves as a critical intermezzo addressing profound questions regarding duty (*dharma*), selfhood, and more. Lord Krishna, Arjuna's charioteer, and a personification of *brahman*, or the ultimate reality itself, is here presented as a master yogi, one who Arjuna refers to as the "lord of *yoga*" (11.4). Krishna ends up resolving Arjuna's many problems, and the content of his guidance essentially constitutes the heart and soul of the entire *Bhagavad Gita*.

The cyclical view of rebirth and death has implications for a philosophical discussion of the idea of last words for several reasons, one of them having to do with its inexorable connection to the separate and equally consequential doctrine that the self, or *atman* is eternal, transcending all temporal (as well as material) limitations. The *Bhagavad Gita* continually promotes the idea of the eternity of the self, as seen in a statement like the following, where this notion of the self is contrasted to that of the body: "These bodies are known to have an end; the dweller in the body (the embodied self) is eternal, imperishable, and immeasurable. Therefore, O Bharata, fight!" (2.18). Our self is eternal under this account even if we cannot, at present, currently recall any of our previous lives, or any details about those former bodies of ours which have undergone countless deaths in the past. This serves to create a bit of a paradox with respect to death's importance, appearing as it does to be a routine event which, on some level, is also unreal, yet still represents a critical important opportunity all at once.

The Paradox of Death I: Death as Routine

Considering the cyclical nature of life and death and the eternal nature of the self, the significance of death is not as momentous as commonly perceived. Death is not a final separation from the world but rather a routine transition—one that the self has already experienced countless times through prior embodiments. Consequently, if death does not permanently sever connections and does not represent a definitive departure, what does this mean for the perceived importance of someone's last words? It seems to render them less significant, as much of our interest in last words is tied to the belief that they are final and definitive. If an individual could die every other day and come back to life the day

in between, the idea of last words would surely lose part of their appeal or significance. In the cyclical view of existence, life and death are like a drawn-out version of the same recurring process.

Additionally, since this cycle extends indefinitely into the past, it is probable that one has experienced death more times than certain mundane events whose instances are generally forgettable. Consider, for instance, an event like ordering a pizza or buying a shirt. It is likely a person has died and been reborn far more times than they have ever ordered pizza or bought a shirt. So why should the infinitely routine event of death be taken more seriously than other common occurrences? If the thought of remembering someone's last words before ordering a pizza or buying a shirt seems pointless, what justifies our interest in last words at the time of death? Assuming the cyclical view of rebirth and death is true, and death is both non-final and no less frequent than these events, our traditional view of last words may need re-evaluation.

If the importance of someone's last words before death is not tied to the notion that people only die once, or to the idea that death represents an absolute end, then what is it tied to? While not equating death with just any other event, an awareness of the cyclical nature of rebirth and death should lead us to view it as less of an irruptive, ultimate event for the individual who has died. This is why the *Bhagavad Gita* advises against excessive mourning. In the end, the death and rebirth of a person are as frequent, inevitable, and natural as night and day: "Even if you think of it as constantly being born and constantly dying, then too, O great warrior (Arjuna), you should not grieve like this. Certain is death for the born and certain is birth for the dead; therefore, this being inevitable, you should not grieve" (2.26-2.27). Consequently, just as one does not mourn the setting of the sun, one should not grieve death, viewing it instead as a natural, cyclical event that everyone has gone through and might continue going through a countless amount of times.

The Paradox of Death II: Death as Unreal

While death is routine on some level, it is crucial to clarify that it is never the self, or *atman*, that perishes, for the self is eternal. Acknowledging this, in turn, only seems to downgrade death's significance even further, for on some level death is not real at all. Krishna articulates this in the *Bhagavad Gita* as follows: "There was never a time when I was not, nor you, nor even these rulers of men. Nor will there be a time in future when any of us will cease to be" (2.12). He teaches that only the body is what dies: "It is never born, nor does it ever die; nor once having been, does it cease to be. Unborn, eternal, everlasting, primordial, it is not killed when the body is killed" (2.20). So, while something does die, it is only a non-essential

part of who one is. In the end one can understand why Swami Muktibodhananda writes the following: "Death is not total. The physical body dies or the mind dies, but not the soul. Death is not extinction; it is a process of disintegration" (2006, p. 153). This can be seen as a corollary to the doctrine of the eternal nature of the *atman*, who, again, is unbound by time, space, or any categorial constraints that might limit it.

To better understand why death may not be as consequential as it seems, consider Raimón Panikkar's metaphor of the drop of the water with which he sought to explain why death would not change anything about life, once one conceptualises the self in line with the idea of the *atman*:

> What is the drop of water? Is it the drop of the water or the water of the drop? Is it the container, the form, or the contents, the matter? Is it the surface tension, the peculiar individualized form it possesses, or is it the water that form contains? In the former instance, when the drop merges into the ocean it disappears as a drop of water. In the latter instance, it remains as the water of that particular drop and is also merged into the ocean, so that it has lost nothing except its limitations. If we accept that the individuality is the surface tension and the personality the water of the particular drop, we may agree in saying that when the human being dies, his individuality disappears while his personality remains and is even enhanced. For what until then were only external relations across the barriers of finiteness have now become internal relationships (2001, p. 701).

In other words, in the larger sea of being, the water always remains, and if the self is like the water of the drop, then death is no different from life. That is, nothing about death is real or indicative of any true finality.

Such reasoning accounts for why Krishna again advises Arjuna not to mourn, albeit from a perspective slightly different from the one mentioned earlier, which focused more on the countless deaths one's bodies undergo, when he says the following, which serves to underscore the eternal nature of the self, and the subsequent unreality what we take death to be: "This self dwelling in the body of every being is eternal and indestructible. O Bharata, therefore you should not

grieve for all these beings" (2.30). A similar sentiment and critique of grief is also found in the *Katha Upanishad*:

> When he perceives this immense, all-pervading self,
> as bodiless within bodies,
> as stable within unstable beings –
> A wise man ceases to grieve (3.22). [212]

Such teachings, foundational in yoga, reinforce the view, then, that death does not significantly alter our existence at all, emphasising that our biological, embodied conception of life or who one is does not coincide with our true essence.

The Paradox of Death III: Death as Opportunity

While death may technically be just another state, it also presents a critically important opportunity to break definitively with the cycle of rebirth and death. Thus, those who are spiritually prepared will experience death very differently from those who are not, who will simply come back in some other body according to the specificities and nature of their karmic debt. As Krishna explains in the *Bhagavad Gita*, speaking of those in touch with their eternal dimension and its relation to reality: "Those who know me together with (my) material and divine domains and with the supreme sacrifice, becoming disciplined in their minds, continue to know me even at the time of death" (7.30). Furthermore, Krishna, speaking as the embodiment of divinity, asserts, "And anyone, who goes forth remembering me alone at the time of death, enters my being after leaving the body; of this there is no doubt" (8.5). The idea here is that being in a state of self-realisation at the time of death brings about a definitive union with the divine, or absorption into *brahman*. That is, it is thanks to death that one can finally be free in the fullest sense.

In seeing death as an opportunity to achieve the highest state one possibly can, a relevant verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* spoken by Krishna to Arjuna stands out for its potential misinterpretation. Krishna states, "O son of Kunti (Arjuna), whatever state of being a man remembers while leaving his body at the time of death, to that state alone he enters due to his ever persistence in it" (8.6). This verse can be understood in multiple ways, one of them being, as Georg Feuerstein puts it, that "death furnishes us with a magic wand by which can transmogrify ourselves into absolutely anything that captures our imagination when we draw our last breath,

[212] References to Upanishadic texts, in chapter and verse, come from the same Oxford anthology listed in the bibliography (edited and translated by Patrick Olivelle).

even divinity" (2003, p.170). Feuerstein notes this kind of simple and unnuanced reading is presented by popular tradition as the right one, while overlooking the text's deeper lessons. Indeed, it sidesteps everything concerning the ethical significance of yoga, or its connection to *karma*, which seems to be what holds the key in properly understanding its meaning.

Keya Maitra elaborates on how this is all supposed to hold together by suggesting that "one's mental states at the time of death determine the form of rebirth in the can life can be taken as the Gita's effort to operationalize the relationship between karmic residue and rebirth" (2020, p. 93). After all, *karma* is not just about physical actions but also mental states (one's thoughts, intentions, and so on), so one's state of mind at death can be seen as the culmination of all the karmic patterns a person has cultivated throughout life. If a person consistently focuses on spiritual thoughts and actions, one figures their spiritual or karmic debt has been paid, so to speak. Indeed, to speak of remembering a state of being and then entering it, as the verse puts it, also seems to imply that the cycle of rebirth and death cannot be cheated in any way. After all, only someone who has realised their self in the way yoga allows one to, that is, only someone with a sense or knowledge of what is real, or most real, could ever remember anything having to do with their eternal self or reality at the critical moment of death which allows one to definitively break free from the cycle.

The Reality of the Eternal Self

From the unreal
lead me to the real!
From the darkness
lead me to the light!
From death
lead me to immortality!
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (3.28)

The idea that the self must be eternal is anchored in a fundamental distinction between the world of experience and reality proper, parallels Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealist philosophy, which distinguished between the phenomenal and noumenal world. Kant juxtaposes the world of phenomena, that is, the world of appearances, or things as they appear to us (humans)[213] – with the noumenal

[213] Or as divided up, organised, shaped, and constructed by an inescapable mental apparatus which includes certain basic concepts together with the help of space and time, which his transcendental idealism notably views as part of our basic mental apparatus, serving as forms of intuition and not features of things in themselves.

world of things in themselves, which is the world *apart* from any relation to us, or what can be thought of as the world from a God's eye point of view (which, in Kant's view, we have no cognitive access to). For Kant, while humans belong to the world of appearances, any possibilities for selfhood, agency, and freedom hinges on our belonging to the noumenal world, where time and space do not apply, and where we are not determined by the laws of cause and effect that govern the phenomenal world.

The parallel with Kant is useful because the *Bhagavad Gita* similarly attaches its understanding of reality to a realm where the categories that define, classify, and delimit the world of experience – whose defining feature is impermanence – collapse or fail to apply. Consequently, eternity in this context means not infinite duration as such but the absence of any temporal constraints altogether. This implies that anything transient must be unreal on a deeper level: "The unreal has no being; the real never ceases to be. The boundary between these two is thus perceived by the seers of ultimate reality" (2.16).[214]

According to this reasoning, it should be obvious that if someone sees themselves primarily as a byproduct of circumstantial details or events in the world – such as upbringing, education, relationships, traumas, fears, desires, and hopes – then even if we believe these factors to be essential in defining who we are as individuals, that perceived sense of self cannot be equivalent to our real or eternal self. Having already been through countless different existences before arriving at our present reality, there is no reason to think that our self depends on these factors in any way. If you believe your upbringing is key to understanding who you truly are, you must also acknowledge that you might have had very different upbringings in your countless previous lives. One's real self, then, must be thought of as being immune to such determining factors.

Furthermore, considering that one does not know what form or circumstances one will find oneself in during the next iteration, and knowing that after the bodily death of one's present worldly existence, the real self remains constant, it becomes clearer that what we often assume to be key in understanding our real identity

[214] For instance, in the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna grants Arjuna a glimpse into the divine perspective, revealing a reality where our categories or ways of understanding the world collapse. As Debashish Banerji notes, Arjuna perceives "something which is formless and infinite – a mass of radiance extended on all sides without beginning, middle, or end – and simultaneously he sees all possible beings – past, present, and future present in this Being, being born, acting, and dying" (Banerji, 2020, p. 42). This dissolution of conventional categories allows us to understand why the interconnectedness of everything that makes up reality is such an important theme in the *Bhagavad Gita* and yoga in general, and this is encapsulated in Krishna's saying "He, who sees me everywhere and sees everything in me, is not lost to me, and I am not lost to him" (6.30).

may not be so at all. If analytic philosophers define what is necessary or essential about a thing in terms of its truth across all possible worlds, then similarly, under the yogic account, one's selfhood cannot depend on factors related to the conditions of one's present life within a world whose very essence is impermanence. This is especially true since one's past or future lives might involve a very different set of circumstances.

If one is not in touch with the eternal self, one certainly will have no awareness of one's relationship with *brahman* either. In that case, one's vision of everything that matters on a real level is no vision at all, subject as it to the seemingly limitless myopia foisted upon us by whatever worldly illusions and distractions that our generally flawed constitutions as individuals are especially gullible to, referring here to the tendencies, proclivities, and limitations that serve to define our individual personalities.

Overcoming Ignorance and Death through Self-Realisation

> Knowledge born of the finest discrimination
> takes us to the farthest shore.
> It is intuitive, omniscient, and beyond all
> divisions of time and space.
> And when the translucent intellect is as pure
> as the Self, there is Self Realization.
> *Yoga-sutras* (3.54-55)

To better grasp the notion of self-realisation that represents yoga's aim in light of what has just been said about what is real and what is not, one can use an analogy here with the act of dreaming. In such moments, that is, when you are asleep and dreaming, sometimes you might realise that you are safe in bed and not, in fact, say, falling off a bridge. When this realisation takes place the dream's capacity to instil fear should start to diminish almost immediately. You have become aware of its unreality, after all, even though you may still technically be engaged in the dream's narrative on some level (perhaps trying to change and take control over it). This liminal state – awake yet still in the dream, even if about to exit it – parallels the yogic experience of awareness and detachment that leads to self-realisation.

After all, it should be noted that one can realise the eternal nature of one's selfhood while still alive and embodied, for, as the *Bhagavad Gita* tells us, "Even here in this life, those who have their minds established in equanimity have

conquered rebirth, for flawless is *Brahman* and equally present everywhere; therefore, they are established in *Brahman*" (5.19). One could also say getting to this point is also like finding one's true home after having wandered endlessly in darkness across countless lifetimes. To go further with our analogy, one could also say that the actual moment of death, or the transition to what comes next, would thus resemble the end of a dream, in the sense that there is no further return to the confines that worldly existence represents, for, as Krishna teaches, "…a man is no longer confused; abiding in it even at the time of death, he attains absorption into *Brahman*" (2.72).

One can understand, then, why, coming from a yogic perspective, Turlington thinks that the idea that "Ignorance is bliss" is wrong, as she intriguingly and correctly suggests one should think "ignorance is death" (2002, p. 117). Turlington's perspective here resonates greatly with the heart of many of teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, for ignorance when treated in this context is viewed not as a lack of knowledge per se, but rather as possession of a fundamentally mistaken view of the self and reality, one which implies no liberation or release from the cycle will be in store once the moment of bodily death arrives: "The ignorant man, who is faithless and filled with self-doubt, perishes; for the doubting mind has no happiness – either in this world or the next" (4.40). Indeed, Krishna explicitly says, a couple of verses later, that ignorance is the enemy here, and he suggests yoga as the answer to the problems it brings: "Sever this doubt in your heart born out of ignorance with the sword of self-knowledge, and be established in *yoga.* Rise, O Bharata!" (4.42).

This notion of ignorance as death also resonates with the message of the *Yoga-sutras*, where one reads:

> It is ignorance of our real nature that causes the Self to be obscured.
> When ignorance is destroyed, the Self is liberated from its identification with the world.
> This liberation is Enlightenment (2.24-2.25)

Therefore, one can reframe the journey toward self-realisation as one that involves overcoming one's ignorance, for attaining a profound understanding and internalisation or realisation of one's identity and its connection to *brahman* is the ultimate form of wisdom, and the beatific state this brings one to surely sounds closer to bliss than being in a state of ignorance does, and if ignorance is death, then attaining any such clarity provides one with the means to defeat it.

What Self-Realisation, or Liberation from Death, Requires

So, one might ask, what can one do to get things going in the right direction? Yoga's answer is that one must learn to transcend or overcome all attachments to the transient and often painful aspects associated with worldly existence, or the kinds of things that manifest themselves in the fear of death, to give one example. The *Katha Upanishad*, for instance, suggests one can never appreciate or become aware of one's real self while simultaneously at the mercy of worldly matters and concerns, or while subject to the effects of life's vicissitudes:

> Finer than the finest, larger than the largest,
> Is the self *(ātman)* that lies here hidden
> in the heart of a living being.
> Without desires and free from sorrow,
> a man perceives by the creator's grace.
> The grandeur of the self. (3.20)

Similarly, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna suggests to Arjuna that the attitude of detachment which comes after one has purged one's ego, or those aspects of oneself which keep one out of touch with who one truly is, brings one to a general state of peace: "Having relinquished all desires, when a man acts being free from longing, without possessiveness and the sense of 'I' (individuality), he finds peace" (2.71). One's status in this respect is best evidenced in those challenging times that put one to the test: "When his mind is undisturbed in the midst of sorrows, when he has no longing for pleasures, being free from passion, fear, and anger, he is said to be a sage whose thought is steadfast" (2.56).

Achieving this attitude of detachment, which is best described as a holistic and thoroughgoing equanimity or disinterestedness, is not something that must be sought because one is motivated in the first place by a selfish desire to escape all suffering and so on. This should be somewhat obvious, seeing as it would contradict the whole point of the yogic enterprise if the subjective principles underlying one's actions did not matter, particularly considering the deep connection between *samsara* and *karma*. Having gotten this little qualification out of the way, the general strategy is simple, then, at least in outline: if you start learning to remove those obstacles that keep you from realising who you are and what your relation to reality is, then everything you seek will be right in front of you.

The Yogic Solution to Self-Realisation

The solution to the confusion of living in a world of change and illusion is, in the end, to realise and internalise the truth that what is most real about you is your eternal dimension, beyond what you think or feel, beyond any worldly sense or comprehension we may have of our identity or individuality, and the clarity that comes with being both in touch with our true self and its greater relation to reality will, in the end, make even the shift from life to death seem more like a banality than an indicator of finality, seeing as the quality that defines your personality is its immortality.

However, what is involved or required of someone to get there exactly? In addressing how yogic practices can facilitate access to the reality of who one is and how everything interconnects, it is instructive to consider a few specific directives from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Even if much has changed in the practice of yoga since then, the following directives from Krishna can still be said to resonate on many levels in terms of justifying yoga's need to resort to diverse techniques and procedures as well as in explaining how its general mechanism of action is supposed to work:

> Let the yogi constantly discipline himself, remaining in a secret place, alone; his self and thoughts controlled, free from desires, without possessions. Having established a steady seat in a clean place, neither too high nor too low, after placing sacred grass, deerskin, and cloth one upon the other;
> Having made his mind one-pointed, restraining the activity of his thought and senses, let him practise *yoga* for self-purification while sitting on that seat.
> Holding his body, head, and neck erect, motionless and steady; gazing at the tip of his nose without looking in any (other) direction,
> With his self tranquil, free from fear, firm in the vow of chastity, his mind controlled, let him sit disciplined in *yoga* with his thoughts focused on me, devoted to me.
> Ever thus collecting himself, the yogi with his mind controlled attains peace, the supreme freedom that exists in me. (6.10-15)

Such instructions, one can say, aim to reflect the importance of achieving that integral engagement of body, mind, and spirit that yoga finds so essential for attaining self-realisation and liberation, as all these things must be taken care of the right way to ensure the possibility of this goal. They also show that even the tiniest details, such as the surroundings one is in, the nuances of the way one is settled, and one's present state of mind are all critical elements in this search. This explains why many approaches to yoga, such as Hatha Yoga, try to incorporate a mix of different methods, as seen through its emphasis on *asana*, *pranayama*, and meditation.

On the Value of Asanas and the Importance of the Corpse Pose

Have you ever regretted sending an angry email or had a very avoidable lapse in judgement perhaps due to some silly factor, like what you had for breakfast that morning or because you lost your car keys earlier in the day? If one seeks a frame of mind receptive to the clarity that awareness of the eternal dimension of the self and its relation to reality brings, one must ensure everything is in an optimal state that requires even the body to play a major role. From many a mainstream yogic point of view, everyday concerns that only serve as roadblocks to yoga's higher goals can be mitigated by incorporating into one's daily routines the practice of certain foundational yoga asanas, like the tree pose (*vrikshasana*) and mountain pose (*tadasana*), to give but two examples of iconic standing asanas.

Practising asanas is not merely physical exercise, as their structure symbolises and serves to teach us something about the importance of values like rootedness, balance, stability, and interconnectedness, all of which are qualities frequently promoted in yogic contexts for the purpose of enabling one's self-realisation or liberation. For example, the tree pose (*vrikshasana*), which involves standing on one leg while the other is placed on the opposing calf or inner thigh as the arms stretch toward the sky, can be said to symbolise one's being grounded yet still aspiring to transcend, that is, a balance between earthly rootedness and spiritual aspiration. Similarly, the mountain pose *(tadasana*), which in its most basic forms involves standing erect with one's feet together, with arms at the sides, while breathing deeply, or in a relaxed fashion, also embodies groundedness, as well as stability, and strength of an inner kind which is analogous to the stillness of a mountain, and which manifests itself outwardly in serenity. Common yogic wisdom tells us that the practice of these asanas is not tied exclusively to the fact that they symbolise important things, but that their practice can help us internalise these same values or virtues through repetition throughout one's journey to yogic mastery.

One should make special mention here of the subtle nuances underlying the rationale behind one asana that is especially relevant to our larger discussion, which connects yoga to the question of death and last words, namely, the corpse pose, or *shavasana*. In this pose, practitioners lie flat on their backs with arms at their sides, palms facing upward, and legs apart, focusing on breathing while releasing both physical and mental tensions. The state of stillness it engenders allows one to appreciate B.K.S. Iyengar's view of the workings its practice effects within us: "When śavasana is well performed, the breath moves like a string holding the pearls of a necklace together...towards the real self (Ātmā), like a spider returning to the centre of its web" (1993, p. 234). Beyond this, the state one reaches through *shavasana* epitomises much of the essence of the yogic journey toward ultimate detachment, at least the way this is described in the *Katha Upanishad*:

> When senses are firmly reined in,
> that is Yoga, so people think.
> From distractions a man is then free,
> for Yoga is the coming-into-being,
> as well as the ceasing-to-be (6.11).

The symbolism behind mimicking a corpse-like state to teach us to connect with our true self in many ways also teaches one about what death represents, or can represent, ideally.

This corpse pose is often the final pose in a yoga class and its purpose resonates with many themes from the *Bhagavad Gita*, particularly those relating to the balance of renunciation (*sannyasa*) with action (*karma*) through selfless action and detachment in one's search for transcendence, which might be obvious to a non-practitioner at first sight, due to how simple the pose looks from afar, but whose practice and execution is not so easy. Beyond this, Clark and Greene describe it as "an overt symbol of ritual transformation where a student 'dies' in Corpse Pose, ending the period of ritual testing" (2022, p. 56). This pose can thus be said to represent the student's "rebirth" into a new state of being, symbolising a transition analogous to that moment in the deathbed that brings one to absorption into *brahman*. *Shavasana*, then, can ultimately be said to embody the *Bhagavad Gita*'s philosophy of detachment and surrender in a special way, and this by virtue of the way it serves as a model for understanding the *atman*'s transcendence over the physical body in the process.

In examining specific physical postures in terms of how they are supposed to help cultivate or lead to those general mental and spiritual conditions required in the search for self-realisation and liberation, it seems clear why, from a yogic view, practising them throughout one's life with an awareness and appreciation of their purpose and underlying rationale can help one internalise or experience the truth of certain ideas that are critical in this journey, as is for instance the idea that death should be seen as more of a culmination of one's being rather than, say, a mere marker of one's finality.

On *Pranayama*, or Managing Breath to Overcome Death

> "Others again, who are devoted to breathing exercises, sacrifice by pouring the inward into the outward breath and the outward into the inward, having restrained the flow of inhalation and exhalation." *Bhagavad Gita* (4.29)

Indian tradition notably places great emphasis on the concept of breath, recognizing it as a vital component of both physical and mental health due to its connection with the principle of *prana*. *Prana* is understood here to be the vital life force or energies that animate and sustain all living beings, which makes it akin to something like Benedict Spinoza's *conatus*, albeit with an added dimension. Unlike the *conatus*, which refers to the inherent drive of things to persist in its own being, *prana* also accounts for the interconnectedness that ties everything in the universe together. While breath is just the physical process of inhaling and exhaling air, it is believed by tradition to act as the primary medium through which *prana* is absorbed and circulated by the body.

As Swami Muktibodhananda writes in her commentary on Yogi Swatmarama's *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a foundational text on Hatha Yoga from the fifteenth century, "Breathing is a direct means of absorbing prana and the manner in which we breather sets off pranic vibrations which influence our entire being" (2006, p. 149). More specifically, *prana* not only influences biological functions such as circulation and respiration but also aspects of one's mental functioning. Jacqueline Koay and Theodora Barenholtz highlight, in line with this, that *pranayama* is thus about more than just about correct breathing, as one's breath can be seen to reflect one's emotional or mental state in general, referring to it as one's "emotional signature," (2009, p. 29). They note, for instance, how "a stressed-out person breathes shallowly, forcing the breath into the body by aggressive, grasping movements" (*Ibid.*).

Neglecting or managing *prana* can thus adversely affect one's health to the point it rules out one's capacity to reach the goals that yoga seeks (at least in this life), as these require a general state of mind that cannot be said to come easy. As per the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, there is a direct relation between the proper regulation of *prana* and the mind's ability to achieve an ideal state: "When prana moves, chitta (the mental force) moves. When prana is without movement, chitta is without movement. By this (steadiness of prana) the yogic attains steadiness…" (2.2). Consequently, the use of *pranayama* in yoga, which in practice is generally synonymous with breathwork or breath control, is technically done to manage *prana* itself. It also means that finding the right methods to manage *prana* makes *pranayama* something akin to both a science as well as an art.

An example of a basic *pranayama* technique is *nadi shodhana*, or alternate nostril breathing, where one alternates breathing through each nostril to balance the flow of *prana* in the body. Another example of *pranayama* is *ujjayi* breath, where one breathes deeply through the nose, slightly constricting the back of the throat in the process. This produces something that is often likened to the sound of ocean waves, which is why you might often see *ujjayi*, which means "victorious," referred to as "ocean breath." The idea behind it is that by doing it you promote concentration and inner awareness. This would be through the way its effects foster mindfulness and facilitate the inward journey of realising one's true nature, overcoming the fluctuations of the mind whose power over us holds us back from the possibility of self-realisation and liberation. Pranayama, then, can be said to open a clearing in that path that allows for meditation of the sort that leads to the highest state of awareness, consciousness, and being, which yoga prepares one to be engaged in at the time of death itself, helping the determine the content of one's final words or thoughts.

On Meditation

Meditation is another common key component in yoga practice's quest for self-realisation, with the more physical and breathing-oriented elements of yoga which have been examined greatly serving to facilitate and culminate in this deepest mode of introspection. T.K.V. Desikachar, in conversation with Hellfried Krusche, outlines the three general steps of yogic meditation:

- Step one is *dhāraṇa*, which is to fix a focus for your meditation practice.
- Step two is *dhyana*, which is to remain with the chosen meditation focus.

- Step three is *samādhi*, which is to continue with this focus and go further. (2014, p. 114)

Dharaṇā is about zeroing in on an object for an extended period, that is, focused attention, as one begins meditation by selecting a single point of focus and focusing the mind on it. The removal of distractions is key here too and is something that aligns with the Upanishadic ideal of sensory withdrawal that has long been seen as important for the ultimate achievement of yogic goals. *Dhyana* is the evolved state of d*haraṇā* and is thus the uninterrupted flow of concentration on the chosen object, something which should come effortlessly at this stage. *Samadhi*, finally, is an even more intense form of concentration where one's consciousness can be said to unite with the object of meditation itself.

The experience of oneness with the object of one's meditation is described by Desikachar as follows: "When the meditator persists with the chosen focus, the person's meditation on an object and the object itself merge. A state is reached in which there is nothing more between them, and they become one" (2014, p. 114). Attaining *samadhi* implies, more specifically, that one has transcended the ego, or one's usual sense of self, and this is what allows for, or, more technically, serves as a precondition for, *samsara*, which is what comes from union with ultimate reality, or divinity. This sense of union can theoretically be experienced wherever one is, assuming one's surroundings allow for it, and this can even include the deathbed itself, for, as *Bhagavad Gita* puts it: "At the time of death, with his mind unshakable, united by devotion and the strength of *yoga*, focusing his vital breath between the eyebrows, [one] attains that supreme divine Purusha" (8.10).

Stillness, Silence, and Chants: On Last Words and Last Thoughts

"Yoga is the settling of the mind into silence." *Yoga-sutras* (1.2)

The *Bhagavad Gita* notes that, "When restrained by the practice of yoga, all thought becomes quiet" (6.77). Considering all that is involved in meditation, it should be no surprise that yoga values stillness and silence as foundational principles in the way that it does, as these serve to create that ideal environment conducive to deep introspection and self-awareness.

Iyengar notably distinguishes stillness from silence here on the basis that the former involves rigidity due to force of will (1993, p. 232). Stillness is important in yoga because it stabilises both body and mind, allowing practitioners to transcend physical distractions and thus achieve a state of heightened mental

clarity and spiritual awakening. Similarly, silence in yoga is not merely the absence of sound but a strategic tool that allows one to quiet the mind's incessant chatter, which then facilitates a deeper connection with one's true self. In a way, then, one can see that yoga's approach to silence very much falls in line with the mystical Persian poet Rumi's saying that silence is the language of God, and both these elements are thus considered crucial for advancing toward *samadhi*, the ultimate state of meditative consciousness just described, where the individual self merges with the ultimate reality, or *brahman*.

As important as silence is in this context, the value of certain utterances or words is also promoted at the time of death by Krishna:

> Having controlled all of the body's gates, and cloistering the mind in the heart, placing one's own breath in the head, establishing oneself in the steady practice of *yoga*,
> Uttering OM, the one eternal syllable of *Brahman*, remembering me as he departs and leaves his body, he reaches the highest goal.
> O son of Pritha, I am easily attained by that yogi who focuses on nothing else (but me), remembers me constantly, and who is ever-disciplined in yoga.
> Having obtained me, men of great spirit do not undergo rebirth – the abode of suffering and Impermanence; they attain highest perfection (8.12-8.15).

On another occasion, Krishna identifies himself with both the *om* utterance and silent prayer: "…of utterances I am the single syllable (OM), among sacrifices, I am the silent prayer" (10.25). He also says he is "speech" (10.34), before going on to identify himself with a chant and type of poetic metre (10.35).

The importance of the *om* mantra lies in the fact that it is supposed to embody the essence of the ultimate reality. It is more than just a word, it is a sacred syllable from which all creation emerges, and it represents the collapse of worldly categories as expressed through sound. Chanting *om* is recommended as a means to achieve self-realisation and connect with the eternal, unchanging truth beyond the temporal world. The vibration of *om* is traditionally seen as one that resonates through every layer of a person's being, promoting peace, harmony, and spiritual awakening in the process. Thus, chanting *om* is not merely vocalising a word, but engaging in a spiritual act that itself facilitates deeper meditation and a proper connection with the divine, thus serving as an ideal last word before passing, one

that, at the same time, is not a word. This is all to say then, that, on some level, all that matters is that one's last words, if we count something like *om* as a word, though even technically just an utterance or syllable, will hopefully be one's truest words as well. Anything short of that would reflect an improper relation to oneself and reality, or an inability to handle or understand the meaning of a worldly affair like death, something which, while routine or unreal on some level, also represents a critical opportunity to break free from the cycle of rebirth and death itself.

In a way, final words represent an opportunity to teach others about the truths one has come to believe in, and that means silence on one's part, or in keeping things internal, when it comes to how one should express, if at all, one's final words or thoughts could end up depriving others of yogic wisdom that might end up being useful in bringing about the self-realisation of others. This should mean any attempt at articulating a yogic perspective on the meaning and value of last words should not be seen as limited to endorsing utterances of a chant-like nature, or of a purely devotional nature, if one can be instructive or socially oriented with one's words in the process. A historical example can illustrate this point. While the context of the *Bhagavad Gita* and part of Krishna's message to Arjuna might appear at odds with certain aspects of a pacifistic worldview, it is noteworthy that one of the most prominent admirers of the *Bhagavad Gita*'s yogic philosophy was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi lectured on it and even translated it from Sanskrit to his native Gujarati. Having survived several assassination attempts, Gandhi likely knew he would die at the hands of an assassin. His collected sayings and writings reflect such awareness. He desired his last words to align with the *Bhagavad Gita*'s yogic directives while serving a public purpose, perhaps to instruct his own assassin and others.

In June 1947, before his assassination in 1948, Gandhi reportedly said in a private conversation: "If someone killed me and I died with prayer for the assassin on my lips, and God's remembrance and consciousness of His living presence in the sanctuary of my heart, then alone would I be said to have had the non-violence of the brave" (Pyarelal, 1958, p. 101). Similarly, in a prayer discourse from the summer of that same year, he spoke about the value of publicly-expressed, pedagogically-oriented final words which concord with the *Bhagavad Gita*'s directives on last words or thoughts:

> And it is my constant prayer that I may never have a feeling of anger against my traducers, that even if I fall victim to an assassin's bullet, I may deliver up my soul with the remembrance of God upon my lips. I shall be content to be

> written down as an impostor if my lips utter a word of anger or abuse against my assailant at the last moment (*Ibid.*, p. 324).

Final words that fall in line with such intentions can teach people a lesson and serve as an inspiration if witnessed or recorded, which would be impossible if everything were carried out in silence before death. These words are not contrary to yoga's stance on silence and stillness, as their motive is ethical and seems perfectly compatible. This does not imply that silence is always inferior. Even in the second quote, where Gandhi talks about not saying anything bad to his assailant, one sees how silence can potentially be powerful too. In the end, Gandhi's actual last words are a matter of debate, but they are often believed to have been "Hey Ram" (roughly "Oh God"), as prominently featured in his memorial in Delhi, representing a divinely inspired call for mercy or expression of anguish.

So, it is true that while a yogi may place greater value on the mind's silence and stillness in seeking to transcend its incessant stream of discursive activity, whereas the ordinary language used in formulating last words might symbolise our limitations as humans on some level, none of this should be seen as implying that last words are therefore not important at all, or that they should be avoided, at least if one includes sacred utterances like those that make up a mantra. In particular, this is because, even if at the threshold of death, all distinctions that make language coherent should be starting to collapse on some level, the distinction between last thoughts and last words is also blurring, and, so, it seems that, as long as one is engaging in profound self-reflection unmediated by societal expectations and aligning oneself with reality in the process, then how this happens is irrelevant. If writing a note is the only way to do that, then who is one to say that this is less worthy than the same words spoken in the silence of our minds? One should not be fixated on the idea of what form such words or thoughts must take on, because whether one thinks of death as routine or unreal, the fact is it is also a most critical moment for the yogi, and spiritual utterances, regardless of their form, whether inwardly or outwardly expressed, will continue to ensure that her final moments represent an active and conscious embrace of the ultimate reality.

Please see appendix for bibliography.

16. Yoga and the Liberation of the Eternal Self by Alan Daboin

Banerji, Debashish. "Sri Aurobindo, Enlightenment, and the Bengal Renaissance: A Discourse on Evolution of Consciousness," in *The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo: Indian Philosophy and Yoga in the Contemporary World*, edited by Debidatta Aurobinda Mahapatra. 33-52. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

Barenholtz, Theodora and Koay, Jacqueline. *The Science & Philosophy of Teaching Yoga & Yoga Therapy*. USA: Sun Yoga/YogaSense,. 2009.

Clark, Edward and Laurie A. Greene. *Teaching Contemporary Yoga: Physical Philosophy and Critical Issues*. New York: Routledge, 2022.

Desikachar, T.K.V., and Hillfried Krusche. *Freud and Yoga: Two Philosophies of Mind Compared*. Translated by Anne-Marie Hodges. New York: North Point Press, 2014.
Feuerstein, Georg. *The Deeper Dimension of Yoga: Theory and Practice*. 2003, Boulder: Shambhala, 2003.
Iyengar, B.K.S., *Light on Prāṇāyāma*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1993.
Maitra, Keya. *Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita: A Contemporary Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.
Nadkarni, M.V. *The Bhagavad-Gita for the Modern Reader: History, interpretations, and philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2017.
Olivelle, Patrick, ed and trans. *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
Panikkar, Raimón, ed. And trans. *The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjarī (an Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers: New Delhi, 2001.
Patanjali. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Translated by Alistair Shearer. London: Rider, 2002.
Pyarelal. *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase, Volume II*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958.
Swatmarama. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika: Light on Hatha Yoga*. Translated and commented by Swami Muktibodhananda. 2006. Munger, Bihar: Yoga Publications Trust, 2006.
Theodor, Ithamar. *Exploring the Bhagavad Gītā: Philosophy, Structure and Meaning*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2010.
Turlington, Christy. *Living Yoga: Creating a Life Practice*. New York: Hyperion, 2002.