

PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS

Donald S. Lopez, Jr., Editor

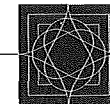
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YOGA

I N P R A C T I C E

Edited by
David Gordon White



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PRINCETON AND OXFORD

SIXTH STAGE: LIVING LIBERATION

66. The sixth stage is another name for the soul as it traverses these steps:
All form is seen as neither nonexistent nor existent.
One obtains action neither with an ego nor without an ego.

67. In solitude, with thoughts diminished,
one dwells in a state released from "oneness" or "two-ness."
With the knots of karma untied, one finds peace in the body,
living as a liberated soul.

68. Standing neither in *nirvāṇa* nor not in *nirvāṇa*,
one shines brightly,
outwardly free, inwardly free,
free like the piece of sky in a jar.

69. Full on the outside, full on the inside,
as full as a jar overflowing with water,
this person seems highly accomplished,
but also seems like nothing special.

SEVENTH STAGE: FREE FROM THE BODY

70. Having dwelt in the sixth stage,
one then attains the seventh stage:
this is called liberated, freed from the body.
This is the seventh stage of yoga.

71. Peaceful beyond words,
this state is beyond the horizon of the earth.
By some, it is called Śiva.
By others, it is referred to as Brahmā.

72. By some, it is determined to be female, others call it male.
Thought of in so many ways,
at the core of things, it is imagined as the Self.

73. How can this eternal, indescribable consciousness be described?
Its attainment has been spoken of in seven stages by me to you, O Rāma.

7

A Fourteenth-Century Persian Account
of Breath Control and Meditation

Carl W. Ernst

While it is perhaps contrary to customary expectations, practices associated with *haṭha yoga* were in fact known outside of India in Muslim intellectual circles. The most important example of this phenomenon is the text known as the *Amritakunda* or *Pool of Nectar*, which circulated in Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and Urdu versions from the seventeenth century onward, in Persia, Turkey, and North Africa as well as in India. The Muslim readers of these texts understood them differently according to their presuppositions. Some were attracted by the occult and magical powers promised by the yogis, who in these texts are invariably called jogīs, in North Indian pronunciation. Others saw in these writings significant parallels to the philosophical and mystical traditions current in Persia, which were particularly associated with Sufism and Neoplatonism. Over time, accounts of yogic meditation practices were increasingly Islamized, so that eventually it became difficult to recognize anything particularly Indian or foreign about them. Although descriptions of jogīs are relatively common in Islamic literature, the word "yoga" (*jog*) hardly ever occurs, but it appears to be regularly represented by the Arabic-Persian term for ascetic practice, *riyāzat*.

The text translated here is the earliest known description of yogic practices found in the writings of Muslim authors. It is a short passage found in a voluminous encyclopedia compiled in Persia by a noted Shī'i scholar and physician, Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Mahmūd Āmulī, who died in Shiraz in 1353. For decades he had taught in the academies established by the Il-Khan Mongol rulers of Iran. While half of this encyclopedia focuses on the Islamic religious sciences, half of it is concerned with the sciences of the ancients, which for all practical purposes included philosophy, science, and the arts. The passage translated below occurs in the section on natural sciences, which in-

cludes medicine, alchemy, interpretation of dreams, astronomy, occult sciences, veterinary science, and agriculture.

Amulī focuses on two elements associated with the yogic tradition: the control of breaths, and meditative practices associated with the cakras. The material that he briefly summarizes here is known to exist in longer versions, most notably the Persian text acquired by the Italian traveler Pietro della Valle in southern Persia in 1622, which bears the Hindi title *Kāmrū bijākṣa*, or *The Kāmarūpa Seed Syllables*. That work seems to have been composed by a Persian intellectual in India who became interested in yogic practices of breath control and the summoning of the female spirits known as *yoginīs*. Amulī directly refers to that text, and he also repeats its emphasis on associating these teachings with the goddess Kamak (also known as Kāmākhyā). Breath control is said to be employed by *jogīs* for prolonging life and for divination, and the breaths are divided into five types corresponding to the physical elements; numerous examples are provided to show how breath coming from the left or right nostril can predict the future or provide answers to questions. The notion of five breaths appears to be connected to the classic Indian division of breaths into *prāna*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *samāna*, and *udāna*, as outlined by Kenneth G. Zysk. The use of breath for divination, particularly for predicting death, seems to reflect widespread Hindu and Buddhist Tantric practices found in India and Tibet, as Michael Walter has shown.

The section on breaths is followed by a brief discussion of the “science of imagination” (Arabic *wahm*), which deals with the ascetic lifestyle and the cultivation of the “water of life” (Persian *āb-i hayāt*) to overcome death; the latter is a deliberate parallel for the nectar (*amṛta*) sought in yogic practices. This passage also includes a description of a method for predicting the time of death by concentrating on the afterimage of one’s shadow, and it contains an account of nine psychic centers corresponding to the *cakras* of *haṭha yoga*, each of which is associated here with a vivid image. Other texts such as the *Amṛtakunda* give more extensive and varied accounts of *cakra* meditations, and they also associate them with *yoginī* goddesses, but they continue to employ the term “imagination” for the power that animates all of these extraordinary manifestations. The text concludes on a derisory note, dismissing the entire subject as a waste of time. Although at least one nineteenth-century Orientalist scholar (Alfred von Kramer) saw this passage as proof of the Indian origins of all the mystical practices of Muslim Sufis, in retrospect it appears instead to indicate a relative lack of comprehension of the technical and theoretical aspects of yoga.

The Persian-language source from which this translation is taken is Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Mahmūd Āmulī, *Nafā’is al-funūn fī ‘arā’is al-‘uyūn*,

ed. Mīrzā Abū al-Hasan Sha`rānā (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī Islīmiyya, 1379/1960), 3:360–65, collated with a seventeenth-century manuscript in the collection of Dr. Taufiq Sobhani (Tehran).

Suggestions for Further Reading

The basic problems in understanding Muslim interpretations of yoga are sketched out in Carl W. Ernst, “Situating Sufism and Yoga,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 15:1 (2005), pp. 15–43. The history of the most important transmission of a yogic text in Muslim contexts is presented in Carl W. Ernst, “The Islamization of Yoga in the Amrtakunda Translations,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 13:2 (2003), pp. 199–226. A more extensive version of the text translated below, discovered by Pietro della Valle in the seventeenth century, is discussed in Carl W. Ernst, “Being Careful with the Goddess: Yoginis in Persian and Arabic Texts,” in *Performing Ecstasy: The Poetics and Politics of Religion in India*, ed. Pallabi Chakrabarty and Scott Kugle (Delhi: Manohar, 2009), pp. 189–203. The use of breath in Tantric divination is discussed by Michael Walter, “Cheating Death,” in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White, Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 605–23. Kenneth G. Zysk provides an overview of the five breaths in “The Science of Respiration and the Doctrine of the Bodily Winds in Ancient India,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113/2 (1993), pp. 198–213. Nile Green describes nineteenth-century Muslims interested in yogic techniques in “Breathing in India, c. 1890,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42:2-3 (2008), pp. 283–315.

The Science of Breath and the Science of Imagination

The former is an expression for the knowledge of the breaths and the proofs thereof. The latter is [an expression for] the knowledge of the summoning of imaginations and managing ascetic practice in that. These two sciences are famous among the Indians, and any one who attains perfection in these two they call a *jogī*; they consider him among the company of spiritual beings. They say that Kamak Dev has established both sciences.

They call spiritual beings (*rūhāniyān*) “*dev*,” and they say that Kamak is still living, abiding in the town of Kamru in a cave. To satisfy their needs, they go to the door of that cave, and some claim that they see her. Every day the emperor of that realm sends pure foods and fresh drinks there, which they place

at the door of the cave, where they immediately disappear. Many people have witnessed this affair. The explanation of both sciences is exhaustively discussed in the book *Kāmrū bijākṣa*, which is the most famous of their books. Here, allusion will be made to each of these in a separate section, God willing.

PART ONE, ON THE SCIENCE OF BREATH

Know that the breath sometimes comes from the right side, and sometimes from the left side, and sometimes it is from both nostrils. They relate the right nostril to the sun, and the left to the moon, and they say that in one day 21,600 breaths come forth, or 900 every hour, more or less.

As they say, sometimes in one hour 1,600 breaths come forth, and during two hours, the breath comes from a single nostril. Sometimes it happens that over three days the breath goes from one nostril. There are some jogīs who take no more than a single breath in a day and night, one in the morning and one in the evening. Thus they say that when one reaches this stage, in six months it becomes easy. They consider obtaining this stage to be the cause of long life, the cure for all illnesses, and the attainment of complete happiness.

According to them breath is of five kinds:

1. The earthy breath, and they say that that breath goes towards the ground, and they say it is yellow in color.
2. The watery breath, and that is the breath which goes straight. They say that it is white in color.
3. The fiery breath, and that is the breath that goes upward. They say the color of this breath is red.
4. The airy breath, and that is the breath that goes crooked. They say this breath is green.
5. The heavenly breath, and this breath goes inward. They say its color tends towards whiteness.

They say that whenever the breath goes to the right side, it is a good sign for all of the following: the beginning of affairs, seeing kings and sultans and nobles, asking them for one's needs, going to battle, buying horses and beasts of burden, going to warm climates, cutting nails, branding animals, curing the sick, getting bled, farming, companionship and friendship, looking for lost items, and going north and east.

If it comes from the left side, it is a good sign for planning a trip especially to the west, buying and wearing new clothes, making jewelry, taking children to school, making agreements, marriages, construction, and trade.

They say that the earthy and watery breaths are a sign for abundant fortune

and happiness. The fiery and airy breaths are a sign for depression, trouble, and illness, and the heavenly breath is a sign for confusion and impediment in one's affairs.

They say that when a questioner asks about the nature of a subject, if the earthy breath appears, the subject concerns plants; if it is airy or watery, the subject concerns animals; if it is fiery, the subject concerns minerals; if it is heavenly, it concerns no subject. When someone asks about affairs or a need, if the name of the questioner has an odd number of letters and the breath comes from the right side, that affair will come out right; but if a need arises, and if the name has an even number of letters and the breath comes from the left side, that affair will not come out right and the need will not be fulfilled.

If one asks about a sick person, and the name of the sick person has an odd number of letters, and the breath of the questioner and the person questioned comes from the right side, the sick person will become well; if the name of the sick person has an even number of letters, and the breath of both is from the left side, that sick person is in danger.

If they ask which of two opponents will triumph, [and] if the questioner has come from the side where the breath is increasing, the person whose name he says first will triumph. If the questioner comes from the side where the breath is decreasing, the person whose name he says last will triumph.

If they ask about a pregnant woman, [and] if the questioner has come from the left side, and the breath is increasing from that side, that child will be a girl; if he is coming from the right side, and the breath from that side is increasing, it will be a boy.

If they ask about a foreign army, and the questioner is from the left side, and the breath goes from that side, that army will come; if the breath does not come from that side, or itself decreases, that army will not come.

If they ask about a missing person, whether he is living or dead, [and] if the questioner comes from the side where the breath is decreasing and sits on that side where the breath is increasing, the person is living; if he has come from the side where the breath is increasing and sits where the breath is decreasing, that missing person will not come back. If he comes from the side where the breath is decreasing and also sits on that side, the missing person is dead.

If they ask about someone kidnapped or escaped, and the questioner comes from the side where the breath is increasing, he will come back. If he is from the side where the breath is decreasing, he will come back later.

They say if one's breath is disturbed, so that for an entire day and night one cannot tell [from] which [side] the breath comes, it is proof that one will have a strong child. If both breaths for a day and night are equal, it is a sign of madness. If for four hours continuously breath comes from the left side, it is auspicious.

cious for him. If it is for eight hours, one of his friends will be injured. If it comes for nine hours, one of his relatives will suffer affliction. If it comes for ten hours, he will be afflicted. If it comes for twelve hours, a powerful enemy will appear. If it comes for a day and a night, death is to be feared.

They say when one person fears another, if, at a time when the breath comes from the left side he goes to a garden and picks 120 colored blossoms and sits by running water, casting them into the water one by one in the name of that person, he will become kind and no dread or fear will remain.

They say that if at a time when the breath comes from the right one has intercourse with a woman, a male child will come. If the breath comes from the left side, the child that will be born is female. May the breath be blest, the step fortunate, and the outcome praised.

PART TWO, THE SCIENCE OF IMAGINATION

The basis of this division in their view is ascetic practice. The lowest stage in ascetic practice is that one choose seclusion and abstain from eating meat, drinking intoxicants, and sexual intercourse. One sleeps little, enjoys sweet fragrances, avoids frivolity, eats little, does not dress in clean or perfumed clothes, and does not mix with anyone. If someone gives him the worst possible injury, he does not seek retribution or become concerned about it. The highest stage is that one is satisfied with fish for daily food, sleeps only one hour a week, and only breathes twice a day, so that his state is perfected, he controls the universe, and after that he does as he pleases.

One of the marvelous things told there is that they say if, at the time of weakness and the sign of death, one imagines that the water of life is flowing within oneself, and one becomes firm in this imagination and makes it continuous so that there is no interruption in his concentration, he will be released from that weakness and death will be repelled. He carefully follows this very method so that he lives, but when he grows tired of himself and no longer is busy repelling [death], he will be destroyed.

Some say such-and-such a person will never die; rather, when he becomes pure of all obscurities, he will no longer need food and drink, but will become purely spiritual and hidden from the eyes of men.

They say if one does not know how much of his life remains, when the sun has risen and is high, one goes to the desert and faces west, opposite one's shadow on the ground, standing straight and motionless. One places both hands on the knees, as when one bows [for Islamic ritual prayer], summoning this imagination without permitting any other thought. Then one raises the head and gazes at the shadow. If he sees the shadow whole in body, it is a sign

that he has [much] life remaining. If he sees that he lacks a hand, two years remain to him. If he sees that he lacks a foot, one year remains.

They say that the places of the imagination are nine:

1. The first is the skull.
2. The second is between the two eyebrows.
3. The third is the throat.
4. The fourth is the slender hole near the nostrils, which is in the gullet, and which leads to the brain.
5. The fifth is the heart.
6. The sixth is the belly.
7. The seventh is the navel.
8. The eighth is the genitals.
9. The ninth is the seat.

The imagination of the skull is like the moon become full. The imagination of the eyebrow is like the sun. The imagination of the throat is like light. The imagination of the nostrils is like darkness. The imagination of the heart is like a burning lamp. The imagination of the belly is like a burning candle. The imagination of the navel is like the rays of the sun. The imagination of the genitals is like fire. The imagination of the seat is like moonlight.

They have demonstrated every one of these subjects, but since discussion of that cannot conceivably be very useful, this will be sufficient.