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## YOGA & SPORT - NAMASTE OR LOG OUT

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### ABSTRACT

The issues about the relation between Yoga and Sport have not been sufficiently studied in scientific literature. But they are part of the bigger question about the place of Yoga and Sport in the modern world. **Research methods:** theoretical analysis and synthesis, exploration and interpretation of international acts and ancient sources in the field of Yoga and Sport. **Aim:** The author poses frankly and clearly the questions concerning the relation between two at first sight incompatible social phenomena - Yoga and modern Sport, the way they are understood and developed. The results from the application of a specific educational model of Yoga and Sport provide new starting points for both social phenomena, so that they can be mutually enriched and developed in order to be useful for society. **Results:** Yoga is not a sport but can be practiced as a sport if it follows certain scientific standards. **Conclusion:** Yoga education in the context of sports education can be one of the models for the successful implementation of unique ancient knowledge in the modern digital era.

**Key words:** yoga, international acts, sport, education, philosophy, culture, knowledge

made only of will”  
„Satapatha Brahmana“

### INTRODUCTION

If we recall the facts throughout the centuries, we will yet again see that they belong to many civilizations. Namaste is the gesture of acceptance who betrayed from the ancient Vedas the emotional links from the sacral ceremonial and the ritual. This gesture is a concrete expression of worldview and cultural identity for what Hegel describes in his Philosophy of History as a starting point for the Western world. Yoga is also specific expression of this ancient Indian cultural identity, which is an integral part of the *non-material cultural heritage*. Due to its common human value and relevance, this identity has been confirmed quickly and successfully in

any cultural and value context. In terms of historical borders and facts, this validation took place in the period between 1893 and 2014. The Forgotten Yoga appeared to contemporaries in a memorable speech delivered by Swami Vivekananda to the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago. And was in its resolution 69/131 of 11 December 2014 that the United Nations declared 21 June for the International Yoga Day. This first modern period in Yoga’s development, characterized by a growing awareness of its essence, is labeled as “the stage of awareness”. Awareness again makes consciousness consciously and directs thinking to the thinking (Carl Jaspers). It is logical that following awareness comes to the next higher stage - “the stage of conscious action”. The first conscious action after resolution 69/131 was the protection of Yoga as a non-material cultural heritage by its incorporation into the Representational list in the meaning of UNESCO’s Convention of the same name. The global action plan for physical activity 2018–2030 of the World Health Organization gives Yoga relevance as a means of improving health.

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According to UNICEF, children can practice yoga poses without being exposed to any risk whatsoever and gain the same advantage that adults gain. Obviously, the integration of yoga is achieved along the path of institutionalization. It was back in ancient societies that human experience was transmitted in the process of training and education. Yet this axiom does not solve the problem with the teaching and studying of yoga in the modern world. On the contrary, this problem became more serious. The reason for this is the fact that institutionalization both as a process and an outcome requires a particularly cautious approach, as the accumulated experience so far has shown. In the current context, there are three specific questions that matter: should yoga be studied, where should it be studied and how should it be studied. If they are expanded, these questions can be formulated as follows: should yoga be taught within the system of education and from what age respectively. At what level should yoga be taught – whether or not in an institutionalized manner; should it be taught in its entirety as a *system* or should only selected “modernized” parts of yoga be taught; should its right to existence as a separate private field of science be recognized or should it be broken down into separate components that should be taught as an integral part of other sciences such as, for instance the system of sport or medicine as untraditional medicine, as an art, philosophy, psychology, religion... **These are vitally important questions** with regard to teaching yoga. Today there are various approaches to solving these major "preliminary" questions. Traditional communities (schools) have been dealing with teaching yoga following the example of the Indian ashrams and non-for-profit organizations – whether on their own or in partnership with the government. Separate components of yoga – such as asana or pranayama – are taught at medical universities. There are also colleges of arts where Yoga is taught. Hence there is no uniform, valid and generally accepted concept about teaching yoga as an adequate reflection of awareness. The most dominant approaches are liberal, commercial, spontaneous and partial. Providing the right answers, in addition to other advantages, will provide a competitive advantage in terms of

human capital (in the terminology of Gary S. Becker). And yet what are the "right" answers? In order to define *the problem*, we will make a brief overview of the specific social conditions in which the problem should be resolved.

## METHODS

This theoretical piece of research aims to raise some of the issues pertaining to the link between Yoga and contemporary sport. The popular perception of Yoga is examined through Internet sources, while the scientific searches are presented by summarizing the conclusions made in some topical biblio-metric analyses. Based on observations and experience, the results of the analysis during the four-year bachelor's degree in yoga at the National Sports Academy (NSA) in the period between 2017 and 2021 are synthesized in the most abstract way possible to achieve the goals of this analytical theoretical article.

- **Background. “Yoga in the museum of the contemporary “art”.** If we imagine the Internet as a gigantic virtual museum, the Yoga artifacts occupy an enviable space. There Yoga is represented as a system of physical, mental and spiritual practices, the purpose of which is to bring about the transformation of the body and the mind; it is one of the six Hinduism schools of philosophy that perceived meditation as a major means to achieve liberation/emancipation; Yoga is a fundamental science for the religion of Hinduism, which had different schools, directions and trends and as a type of Indian gymnastics. It is in this source that we came to know that there are several types of yoga, each being a separate science: Radja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Karma Yoga, Kriya Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Tantra Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Ghana Yoga, Nada Yoga, Yantra Йora. In the many Yoga websites, the artifacts strikingly resemble one another and may be boiled down to a number of phrases such as: anti-stress yoga, office yoga, air yoga, yoga for children, yoga for the pregnant, yoga for good sex and for help with infidelity, anti-depression yoga, anti-diabetes yoga, yoga for fertility, astro-yoga, Kama Sutra yoga, Siddha yoga, Shiva yoga, sport yoga, hot yoga, corporate yoga and various other types of baroque yoga: stretching, bliss, flexibility, energy, esoteric, mysticism, religion, sacral,

merger, separation, aura, chakra, equilibrium, pure conscience, levels of existence – physical, mental and spiritual, control of the body and mind, bodily discipline, mind control and meditation, Om. ... Moreover, yoga's roots have been also "captured" by the taste for entrepreneurship of the curators of the virtual Yoga Museum. The roots either refer to the era of the Indo-Aryans 6500 or to the cultures of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro – between the years 4000 and 1000 B.C. Some are brave enough to dive into the deepest layers of archeology, yet they do not have the patience and hard work of unearthing layer after layer, such as Vinkelman, Shampolion, Schliemann, John Lloyd Stevens ... For the unbiased reader who is not tempted enough, it remains a mystery what is it that exactly unites this system of practices and what their essence is, why should there be a need to transform something and how this transformation takes place and in what direction, what the meaning of "meditation" is and how it relates to liberation/emancipation, what do we need to liberate/emancipate ourselves from, why yoga is a religion, moreover a fundamental one; what is the meaning of a "school of yoga" and how to make the distinction between "school", "way/tendency" and "type" of yoga; how many types of yoga are there and how do they differ from one another; why exactly Om and not Wow for example.... The newest type of yoga, "yoga on the laughter", is a good occasion to keep our sense of proportion, leaving the penumbra in the last corners of the virtual museum. Especially given the strange repetition of the exhibits, which are beginning to compete with each other in what Baudrillard defines as hallucinations from the reality of a simulated society whose consumer culture has blurred the distinction between the real and the imaginary.

- **Yoga in science.** In the last decades there has been some interest in research connected with Yoga. We judge about the directions, scope, breadth and depth of this research interest and whether it pertains to some convergence or some superficial flirt, by the quantitative and qualitative analysis made. The bibliometric analyses that map the development and the state of affairs of the systemic reviews of the "evidence on yoga for health" type carry most information

on the topic. In the systematic reviews of Yoga (1) the following problems have been identified: Researchers find it difficult to identify, classify, categorize and ultimately conceptualize Yoga. In most reviews yoga is acknowledged in the context of the treatment of a health condition or symptom, while few are those oriented towards prophylactics or are unclear. The most frequent health conditions are psychiatric or cognitive in nature (depression/anxiety, psychotic disorders and post-traumatic stress disorders), cancer and disorders of the muscular and skeletal system (pain in the back or in the neck), followed by metabolism-related problems (such as diabetes) and women's health (such as pregnancy or menopause). The reviews do not give any clarity about a *specific "type" or "school of yoga"*, or about the criteria for the admissibility of the yoga intervention. The criterion most often referred to is the need for a physical component such as asanas and/or components such as meditation or breathing. *More than 50 permutations* have been identified of the articles' headlines about the types of intervention such as for instance: "exercise" or "interventions of the mind and body", "supplementing" or "integrative" medicine, "meditation" or "caution and non-pharmaceutical interventions", from "alternative" and "training for balance" to "relaxation" and "tensile stretch". Some 75 percent of the publications come from one of the following six countries: USA, Germany, China, The United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. Noting the rising *interest* on the part of the clinical and research community in yoga, the authors believes that the so-called *heterogeneity* of the yoga practice is in effect a challenge to conducting and applying the research in yoga. The assumption is held that the *introduction* of a standardized terminology will facilitate the distinction between yoga interventions and yoga therapy.

- **Yoga darshan.** The criterion that is most often mentioned in the systematic reviews is that there should be a *physical component* in the yoga interventions. This is not accidental. Just as the world owes to the wise man Uddalaka Aruni ("Chandogya Upanishad") the insight about the knowledge of things through their *concepts*, to Sankhya darshan – the idea about cause-and-effect relationships, in the same manner, we owe

to Yoga darshan the philosophical insights about movement as a form of the existence of matter. It is namely in Yoga darshan that the *philosophical insight* about the vital dependence of mind on matter evolves into the idea about the reverse *dependence of matter on mind*. It is this insight that gives birth to Yoga as a unique composition of knowledge (darshan) and practice (abhyasa), which are strengthened in the fire of action (kriya) and tapas (self-discipline, asceticism). There occurs something that is unprecedented and unique in nature – movement is incorporated within a philosophical doctrine *as a method of adaptation to superior levels of consciousness and thereon to the autonomy of the human will from the conditions of human existence*. The empirical awareness that motion is a method of handling matter sets the beginning of the abstract philosophical insight about movement as the form of existence of matter. *Practice* becomes a criterion of *truth*. This is the *essence* of yoga darshan, emancipated from its roots - Sankhya. This insight is synthesized in a beautiful and memorable form in *Shiva Samhita*: “With the help of abhyasa success is achieved, with the help of practice liberation is achieved. With the help of practice a perfect consciousness is achieved. With the help of practice Yoga is achieved. With the help of practice, we can snatch the catch from death” (SS, IV, 9-11). Furthermore, this is what is written in *Hatha Pradipika*: “How can man possibly achieve success without practice? Success in yoga cannot simply be achieved by reading authentic books. Wearing a specific type of clothes does not bring success, nor does talk about it. It is only practicing that brings success – this is the doubtless truth” (2).

- **Yoga and sports.** Movement as an essential and innate attribute of human existence is what unites the two cultural and social phenomena – Yoga and sports. However they are very different. The act of motion in Yoga is not a *causa sui*, it is merely a means to an end. *Causa finalis* is spiritual – reaching the state of samadhi, a superior state of human existence, supra-consciousness a liberation from the fetters of matter and of life. The ethical and the moral (Yama and Niyama) are not only mandatory components at the start of the road; in Yoga they are “the supreme and great pledge that is not

conditioned by birth (in a definite social status, caste) or by the area (of living), or by time and opportunities” (Pātañjalayogasūtrāṇi, II-31). “Virtue in the moral world is what law is in the physical world” (3). “The triad” of *means, methods and goal* carries the major meaning-identifying sign, that is, it is an essential sign that distinguishes it from the other forms of culture and mainly from the other forms of physical culture. The daily recurring “anushtana” (program) of the eight components of yoga (“angi”), tailored to the specific follower and called “sadhana” (sadhana, feat, achievement), is “generally speaking” the method by which the means of used to achieve a goal - liberation in life - Jivanmukta, kaivalya or moksha (4). Among the most serious reasons for the emergence of sport is satisfying the need to gain experiences and position-related material goods. The sport emerged at a comparatively late stage of the evolution of the competing man, and in the cultural world of ancient Greeks, it was immediately connected with acquisition, competition, success, glory and entertainment. The result in sports is *causa finalis*, absolutized victory is an expression of the superiority over the other man, moreover at any cost. *Aut Caesar, aut nihil*. Following the economic logic of expedience and of the intensified motion-related activity, the sport was increasingly departing from its original “conception”, being transformed from “agonistic into antagonistic”. Modern sport has lost its vital and moral functionality and is now based on systematic and specific training that is needed to perform a spectacle with a high price on the sports market. The contemporary professional sport is subject to a new morale – that of unconditional success. In it the atavistic aspiration for acquisition of material and symbolic goods - fame and prestige is actualized in a peculiar way (5).

The sports training occupies a central place in sport, especially the sport for high achievements. As a process this exercise is systemic, result-oriented, highly intensive and scientifically justified work of sportsmen to reach high results in a special type of motion-related activity. The result in sports, and the aspiration towards acquisition comprises an *external motivation*. In Yoga the motivation is entirely *internal*, and the

aforementioned *method* comprises the daily sadhana throughout human life that sticks together through the mental and bodily *self-discipline*. *Liberation* from the very desire for acquisition is the price, the prerequisite and the result from Yoga as a process, interpreted as “a way of life” (“Liberation from the desire for possession leads to an understanding of the reasons for existence”, Pātañjalayogasūtrāṇi, II-39). Yoga may be “*a way of life*”, considering that the “yoga training complex” facilitates reaching the *equilibrium/balance* with regard to

the constant, usual and repetitive in the daily routine requirements towards the organism set by the external environment, as well as achieving the *equilibrium/balance* of opposite tendencies in the internal environment. Sports cannot possibly be “a way of life”, given that the sports training is a temporary adaptation to the extraordinary and unusual requirements to competition. The results from the analysis and comparison are further outlined in **Table 1**.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Comparison between the sports training and the Yoga training complex

Sports training	Yoga sadhana
1. Temporary lasting adaptation to the exclusive and unusual requirements of the competition.	1. Active balancing with the individual’s habitual conditions of life throughout their life.
2. Highly intensive motor activity.	2. Bodily motor, mental, spiritual (moral) self-discipline.
3. Strictly purposeful process with the aim of achieving high sports results.	3. Strictly purposeful process with the aim of achieving spiritual results.
4. Physiological basis – the organism’s ability to adapt and react to the applied physical load with recovery processes which not only compensate the functional and energetic losses but are also transformed into a state of extra-compensatory assimilation that exceeds the initial level of working capacity.	
4.A.1. First phase – fatigue – reduction of the working capacity to the below level. Increased pulmonary ventilation, disrupted rhythm of the breathing movements, increased viscosity of the blood, reduced Ph, increased quantity of lactic acid, reduction of chlorides due to excessive sweating, accumulation of keno toxins as specific products of fatigue. Redistribution of blood towards the exercised muscles – reduces the vascularity of the non-working organs at the expense of the working ones, reduces renal excretion and the latter is assumed by the skin, the frequency of the heart activity reaches 200 to 240 beats per minute.	4.B.1. The curve of physical ability in the phases of general capacity varies with smaller amplitudes. The frequency of breathing is considerably reduced with an increased minute volume of ventilation. The volume of the motor air is increased a couple of times, and the relative share of the non-ventilated air is reduced. Increased Ph - alkalinization of the blood, no accumulation of lactic acid due to the lack of anaerobic glycolysis. Redistribution of blood towards the internal organs and towards the exocrine glands. Renal excretion is stimulated.
4.A.2. Second phase – Recovery of working capacity – the spent/consumed substances are filled in and the accumulated metabolites are eliminated. Gradual increase of the working capacity curve.	4.B.2. Phase of recovery – it is a consciously achieved self-relaxation of the muscular system after muscular tension to perform the asanas. Impulses of muscular tension and impulses of muscular relaxation are directed toward the cerebral cortex.
4.A.3. Third phase – phases of over compensation/over recovery, at which the working capacity curve, reaching an initial level continues to rise as an expression of over-compensatory assimilation.	4.B.3. A weakly expressed phase of over compensation, maintaining the working capacity without work hypertrophy, but with a quite high level of general vitality.

4.A.4. Phase of Stabilization – the working capacity curve drops to the initial level.	4.B.4. "Samadhi" - a specific state of physics and psyche, which can be "subjectively experienced and objectively observed." (6)
5. Enormous energy expenditure to perform a specific amount of work.	5. Optimal kinesthetic stimulation at the expense of a minimal energy expenditure.
6. The attention of the athlete is wholly busy by the results of the performed training process.	6. The attention is directed towards the successive straining or relaxation of particular muscle groups or towards the consciously controlled rhythmic course of the breathing stream.
7. The sympathetic nervous system is stimulated.	7. The parasympathetic nervous system is stimulated. The psychic background of concentration (dharana) is prepared.

This comparison as a result of abstraction from the non-essential is a sufficient reason to set the beginning of a new debate, the essence of which is to be found in the title of this article.

## CONCLUSION

Yoga originates in the bowels of protoscience. The ritual, mythological, esoteric, mystical, metaphysical and other “prop” of yoga are due to its ancient historical origin and the specific cultural context that gave birth to the phenomenon. Its core is three revolutionary discoveries for the human being as a bio-social creature. The first one is the fact that the transformation of the person into a personality is not a *result*, but a life-long *process* of a daily psycho-physical self-upbringing of the human being. The second is to be found in the fact that physical and spiritual perfection can be achieved by *every* person. The third is the yoga practice itself, shaped as a *way of life*. The contradiction between wrong perception, interpretation, understanding, and practice to Yoga and its strict scientific character may be resolved only via the methods and means of science. The bibliometric and systematic reviews show that the scientific endeavors to find the benefits of yoga would be more valuable if they were completed with the deep understanding of its essence and content. The contemporary theory of Yoga as an integral science should be established on the basis of the *systemic* method and built on it in its full capacity of a historic, systematic and structural and

structural-functional method. Therefore the learning of Yoga in an academic context and particularly for sports education, as is done at the National Sports Academy – Bulgaria, is possible and adequate at the contemporary stage of social development. This teaching and learning is, can and should be continued in close integration with other sciences, including sports science. Thus the unwanted partiality, casuistry, repetition and sometimes self-excuse, found in the systematic reviews can be avoided. That way practicing yoga in its whole richness and its traditional space may be successfully combined both with the academic and the new “virtual spaces”. Movement in its various forms is a mandatory component and a specific tool for physical education, training and therapy in yoga, the specific place of which in Patanjalyayogasutra and other ancient sources is an exact subjective reflection of the goal set in Yoga for self-cultivation throughout life. Therefore Yoga’s natural place in the contemporary world is where movement is. And it is everywhere.

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