

Krzysztof T. Konecki

Is the Body the Temple of the Soul?

Modern Yoga Practice
as a Psychosocial Phenomenon



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as a Psychosocial Phenomenon

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Foreword

Yoga is growing in popularity in Poland. As with every fashion, this leads to a number of simplifications, and sometimes even misunderstandings.

Meanwhile, the book by Professor Konecki is a book about yoga in the context of modern culture. It is also a book about modern culture in the context of yoga. It gathers the experience of trainees, and shows as well the phenomenon that evolved out of Indian tradition and became an integral part of Western-European lifestyle.

One may ask: in a world of corporations, business transactions, sports competitions and a lay world which is mistrustful towards everything that does not withstand the trial of rational discussion, is there space for the search for inner peace and harmony? How much does physicality (asana exercises) bind with spirituality? It is worth asking yourself these questions even if you have never set nor intend to set foot on the yoga mat. Maybe it is especially worth asking in a country like Poland, which is so dynamically changing and where the meaning of individual choices is becoming ever more important. Every thought which helps one harmonize the micro-cosmos that every human-being is, as well as consciously influence the macro-cosmos - the way the society functions and the way to treat the world we live in - is very valuable. Yoga, which may be treated as "the everyday life religion" (as described by Professor Konecki), or as a way to keep one's psycho-physical fitness in good shape, or as a chance to build community relationships, or connected with Indian culture, or maybe with the New Age, definitely offers one a chance to take control of his or her life. Even if we start from something as basic as our body, if we fully realize the influence that we have on it, that our body really belongs to us, maybe it will be easier to accommodate other aspects of our lives: conscious decision-making, human relations, and our use of natural resources and of the skills given to us. Is this a utopia? Perhaps, but perhaps too it is an opportunity that we overlook because it gets crushed by life's everyday pressures, and because we run away from difficult confrontations with here-and-now solutions.

The very title of Professor Konecki's book - *Is the Body the Temple of the Soul?* - creates a question from Iyengar's statement. At the same time, he makes the statement problematic by showing that yoga can

also be treated as a display of Western-Europeans' detailed focus on fitness, or as a para-religion. The practice of yoga practice is always within the sphere of individual, private choices. This makes the usage of the tool, which asana exercise is, both easy and difficult. In the multitude of different and often equal propositions, the sole question about the sense, the essence of our experience or actions sometimes sounds naïve, even false. This can wash away the boundaries between yoga and regular visits to the gym, which can make the obtainment of pleasure from a yoga which does not comprise the physicality difficult. At the same time, spirituality is often dwarfed and exotic displays of it are treated suspiciously. But maybe the possibility of choice, of going down the path of yoga as the result of a personal search, allows for experimentation, for breaking through the externalities and searching for what is important for a given person.

Maybe too it is possible to look at this situation from a different angle. One of the aims of practicing yoga is to sharpen our attention, to build up the skill of penetration, without any prejudice or upfront judgments, into our perception of the world.

Does not the academic sociology have similar aims? In both cases we sit down in peace and quiet to observe what is. We do not try to change or improve anything at once. We concentrate on disciplining and making order of our busy everyday perceptions.

I myself have been practicing yoga for many years now, and it has resulted in very in-depth changes within me. My journeys to India, and acquaintance with the mystical traditions of the country that I have come across, have had a great influence on the kind of man I am today. Hence the scientific approach introduced in the work *Is the Body the Temple of the Soul?* interested me greatly. My reading of this book offered me the possibility to look from a distance at what I have created in my current life. As a teacher, I am happy to find that yoga has become a subject of such a thorough reflection. This book provides a way to show asana and meditation not only as a way of spending free time, but also as an important cultural factor.

Michał Szczepanik
Hatha-Yoga Center, Łódź
May 6, 2012

Introduction

In modern Eastern societies, we are looking for something that would take us away from everyday life, from the workload and the problems connected with work, or the lack thereof. Everyday life is what aches us the most, but we have to go through it to achieve maturity and ask ourselves serious questions. This maturity is often connected with the will to understand oneself, the mind, and the body. The inherent limitations of these aspects are strongly visible when we cannot manage with the race of our thoughts connected with a purposeful, rational usage of time, which the harder we try to achieve, the more control we lose. Our mind often does not cope with the everyday routine that thickens more and more around us, where in our perception time often loses its linear character, being just a way to get us to a moment, in the form of meetings and making further plans and arrangements. Hence step by step we become weaker, both mentally and physically.

Feeling this, we often end up asking ourselves the question: "How can we stop this course?" Others may ask: "How can we improve the shape of their bodies and minds in order to manage with the slowly-consuming everyday life?" These two adult questions ("adult" not being connected here with biological age, but with one's state of mind) create a motivational base for the search to find a permanent and stable drift in everyday life, or to strengthen one's psycho-physical state in order to manage life. Thus begins an individual search. Some turn towards actions connected with other people and in this way realize that time is a relative notion, especially when we want to help others. We find time for them. Others find themselves in different types of hobbies, while some run away from everyday life by the simple act of travelling, and thus find themselves in the claws of the tourist agency world. Sport and physical activity also offer a possibility to improve one's psycho-physical state, as well as to escape from everyday life. Training and/or participation in marathons enables individuals to partially run away from everyday life, but still be strongly submerged, and boosting self-esteem is evident in a variety of different, everyday life aims, often not connected with sport. The ego is also working hard in sport.

In our modern Western societies, the industry of making our everyday life more attractive (or running away from it) is growing very

rapidly. Tourist agencies, companies organizing physical culture, and entertainment industries are all trying to penetrate our everyday life, trying to obtain a tidbit of our free time in order to fill it up with something that will seem to make our everyday life less boring, to combat the state of suspension that arises from not doing anything, because not doing anything is poorly perceived in modern society, even widely condemned as a sin in everyday reality. Apart from businesses, different organizations, as well as individual units, offer us new ways of thinking, new forms of activity (often exotic and deriving from other cultural areas), far from the everyday routine constructed by ourselves on the basis of inherited values and norms, in an attempt to fill our free time.

In the context of this trend, we can include companies, institutes and organizations teaching us physical culture and training our bodies and minds, providing us with something to do. Training the body cannot take place without the mind. While training my body, I am also training my mind, and when I force myself to exercise, I shape endurance. By continually training for a longer period of time, I acquire new habits, creating my everyday routine from the start. I change my attitude towards my own body. I begin to perceive it as an interaction partner, which sometimes tries to resist me and other times transforms according to my will. I start perceiving the world through the prism of a body that reacts to outer stimuli.

Before, training the body was only a tool for the mind, a means to achieve an end. When it is the interaction partner, it becomes an active participant in the thinking processes, weighing the alternatives, and making decisions about the action(s) being taken. The body gives us signals that we are finally perceiving. Will I manage? The mind can fight the resistance of the body if it is our slave, a passive tool. However, it is so only up to a certain point. Physical exercises allow us to change the body into an active subject of action, combining with the mind in either managing everyday life, or running from it.

Hatha-yoga constitutes a practice of transforming body and mind so as at the end of this route there is a combining of these two entities, which are so often apart and pitted one against the other. Hatha-yoga in Western culture is often perceived as the practice of physical exercises (practice of the asana position), usually done to improve one's health and emotional state. Even if that is the case, it is still based on the rule of "the silencing of the modifications of the mind." It is about a containment of mind dispersion in terms of non-important, minute, everyday issues, which are not important for the basis of our existence, balance and inner harmony, the unity of body and mind. Even if we

train only for our health and for improvement of our physical fitness, then the end result, in the case of many physical and sports activities, is stopping mind movement. The full concentration on one action, on one point in space, might not have any metaphysical meaning for us, but it still remains full concentration. This can be achieved by patiently practicing hatha-yoga.

The present monograph is an introduction to and a description of the world of social practices of hatha-yoga, the rules that govern it, motivations of those who practice it, and their definitions of situations in which they find themselves. This world is ever more popular and more and more people are practicing hatha-yoga. A whole new industry is growing based on hatha-yoga, which is visible even in our busy everyday lives. It is not without controversies. Some perceive the world of hatha-yoga as a sect and a danger for the mental health of those who practice it, as well as a danger for conventional religions. There are disputes about the source from which hatha-yoga originated; is it typically an Eastern practice or have esoteric Western exercises influenced its modern shape? Other disputes concern whether hatha-yoga is only a set of physical exercises or maybe a more metaphysical pursuit?

Yoga is becoming a more and more popular form of exercise. The research of the fitness market in 2010 shows that yoga occupies, among fitness clubs in Poland, the fourth position in their offer: 1) strengthening classes, aerobics - 100%; 2) strength training - 98%; 3) personal training - 98%; 4) yoga - 88% (Nelke 2010). Yoga is somewhat inscribed in the context of fitness. In Great Britain, it has the support of the government. Yoga was taught in the 1970s in the College of Physical Education, part of the Inner London Education Authority (Hasselle-Newcombe 2005: 305). Women are more likely to practice yoga than men (see: Górski 2004).

How did the social world of yoga develop in Poland? The reception of yoga in our country started a relatively long time ago. Worthy of mention are the crucial pioneering actions of Wincenty Lutosławski, who encountered the tradition of yoga while taking part in Vivekananda's lectures in 1893 in the U.S.A. (see: Lutosławski 1909). According to him, yoga was supposed to be useful in the healthy upbringing of youth in the spirit of patriotism. Lutosławski's interest in yoga was inspired by his health problems; thanks to yoga he cured himself of depression.¹ Next, he familiarized himself with the works of Yoga Ramacharaka, and he both practiced the master's teaching himself and popularized it in Poland, where Ramacharaka's works were also pub-

¹ See: <http://gabinetsurya.eu/?id=art-20120504-1803> (accessed: 30.12.2012).

lished (Ramacharaka 1922; 1923; 1930). The beginnings of the medicalization of yoga seem to also be rooted in Lutosławski's actions those times.

Both the physical and medical aspects of yoga are also visible the in post-war years, in publications from the 1960s and 1970s (Ghose 1962; Bragdon 1970; Michalska 1974; Kogler 1975).

Hence therapeutic usages of yoga existed in our country from the beginning of its popularization. Wanda Dynowska and Maurycy Frydman greatly influenced the development of yoga in Poland. They created a Polish-Indian Library, where they popularized the idea of yoga for Poles and Polish culture in India. The teacher of Maurycy Frydman was initially Raman Maharishi, then Jiddu Krishnamurti. Frydman also wrote in English, bringing the Hindi culture and yoga itself closer to the Western culture. Wanda Dynowska had the same masters. She visited Poland twice, lecturing on Mahatma Gandhi, the philosophy of Krishnamurti, and Sri Raman Maharishi. She also translated books about yoga into Polish, as well as classical Indian religious books (Ghose 1962; Bragdon 1970).

Another propagator of yoga was Leon Cyboran. In 1973, he published his Ph.D. thesis: *The Philosophy of Yoga - An Attempt at a New Interpretation*, and in 1986 his *Classical Indian Yoga of Yogasutra Ascribed to Patanjali and Yogabhashya, in Other Words a Comment to Yogasutra Ascribed to Vjasa* (Cyboran 1973; 1986).

In the 1970s yoga was also popularized in TKKF (Towarzystwo Krzewienia Kultury Fizycznej [The Association of Popularizing Physical Culture]), which directed it towards physical and medical interpretations. A well-known person who popularized yoga was Tadeusz Pasek, a graduate of Poznan University of Economics, Bihar School of Yoga in Munger, a doctoral student of the Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, and an employee of the Psychiatric Clinic of Poznan University of Medical Sciences and the University of Toronto, Canada.² He backed scientific research connected with analysis of the medical effectiveness of yoga. Malina Michalska, who was Lutosławski's student, also popularized yoga in the 1960s. She ran hatha-yoga classes on behalf of the Bihar School of Yoga, and also wrote a book popularizing yoga, *Hatha-Yoga for Everyone* (1974). Her book was also a form of the medicalization of yoga, as it was used mainly for healing purposes.

The medicalization of yoga in publications also continued after 1989, i.e. in the 1990s and continues today (Nagarathna, Monro 1990;

² Ibidem.

Pūrnā 1996; Kulmatycki 1993; Górna, Szopa 2005; Garbara, Szopa 2013). Sometimes yoga is juxtaposed with other therapeutic techniques such as shiatsu, acupuncture, or visualization (Pilkington 1995). Yoga has also sometimes been psychologically oriented and supposed to help solve life problems (Niedźwiedź 1997).

According to an interview with Sławomir Bubicz, in the 1960s and 1970s there were fewer books published and they were connected mainly to the scientific interpretations concerning the physical and psychological sides of yoga (Moćko 2007). It also needs to be underlined that before the 1989 there were both publications accenting the health elements of yoga as well as scientific reports connected with hatha-yoga and other types of yoga that were distributed. Works by M. Eliade (1997) and L. Cyboran (1973; 1986) were published, as well as popular science (Szyszko-Bohusz 1978). However, the physical and medical traditions of yoga were very strongly emphasized in many publications, reflecting the strong tendency at that time towards the medicalization of yoga in Poland.

In the 1980s a great propagator of hatha-yoga in Poland was Sławomir Bubicz, who then began publishing books. He later published some of them in a second edition, inasmuch as the censors of the 1980s did not like the mention of God in texts about yoga. The works in the 1980s also included Gabriella Gubillaro's books (*Hatha-Yoga* 1985, official publication with the intervention of censorship) and an extract of the book *Light on Yoga* by B. K. S. Iyengar, published in a second edition. In an interview, Sławomir Bubicz underscored the difficulties with the publication of books about yoga before the year 1989.³ One of the translations of Iyengar's books by Bubicz was released in 1999 (*Yoga*, Warsaw: PWN). In the 21st century, Bubicz has been the publisher of many books by B. K. S. Iyengar and the greatest propagator of his version of hatha-yoga in Poland. Bubicz was in India for many years and learned directly from his master Iyengar.

As has been mentioned, in the 1990s academic positions about yoga, analyzing the academic traditions of Pantanjali, were also published (Jakubczak 1999). In addition, works medicalizing yoga as a way to help overcome stress, lose weight, maintain hormonal stability, or improve sight also appeared (Kulmatycki 1999), and this trend still continues in the 21st century (Kulmatycki 2000; Teasdill 2001; Lichy 2004; Weintraub 2005; Maddern 2005). It also needs to be emphasized that there is a tendency to direct special offers of yoga exercises to women (Martínez 2009; Jaros 2011).

³ See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTUWonM9RhY> (accessed: 30.04.2012).

Until now (2012), there have about 80 publications on yoga in Poland, including the pre-war ones. In the library of Warsaw University there are currently 74 positions in the Polish language that have the word “yoga” in the title. It needs to be underlined that this collection does not include all of the positions; in particular modern ones published by small, niche publishing houses are not included (e.g., Virya).

In Poland, the tradition of certifying yoga teachers has existed since the 1970s. Such certifications are given by the Association for Propagating Physical Culture and the Polish Association of Iyengar’s Yoga. Specialists emphasize the danger of practicing yoga under the eye of unqualified instructors. This is especially underlined by practitioners who are connected with medicine and conventional physiotherapy (aforementioned). In many other schools the qualifications of yoga teachers are not checked, nor is inquiry made into where and by whom they were taught (Kulmatycki, Burzyński 2008: 166–167).

In Poland, post-graduate studies at the Academy of Physical Education in Wrocław were opened, entitled “Post-graduate Studies of Psycho-somatic Yoga Practices.” The research by Professor Lesław Kulmatycki and Zdzisław Burzyński shows a growing popularity of yoga schools in major cities. In addition, there is a Polish Association of Iyengar’s Yoga (PSJI), whose aim is to maintain contact with the original Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute (RIMYI) in Pune, India, as well as to promote the training and development of yoga in Poland and grant certification to run hatha-yoga classes (Kulmatycki, Burzyński 2008: 160). In Poland, yoga instructors often refer to Iyengar’s traditions. These traditions are referred to by teachers in 42 out of 56 schools analyzed by the researchers (*ibid.*: 169).

All of the above demonstrates that the institutionalization and legitimization of the social world of yoga practice is developing in Poland in a spontaneous fashion and is still not controlled in a formal and legal way. Hence various initiatives, coming from institutions widely recognized as universities or registered associations, are aimed at solving this problem by the certification of qualifications to run classes and yoga schools.

The information published in newspapers and magazines about the healthy effects of yoga also bears witness to the popularity of yoga exercises. Their positive effects on the psyche and the ability to concentrate are often underlined (Rokita 2008a; 2008b). Sometimes there are even supplements to magazines with specific exercises for specific pains.⁴ Various magazines often publish academic information about

⁴ See: supplement to *Shape* 9 (126) in 2010, plus DVD *Yoga for Back Rescue* (in Polish).

the medical effects of yoga practices, contributing to their popularity and social legitimization. This information may be, for example, shown in a particular form, such as: yoga has a calming effect because during exercises a gamma-aminobutyric acid is produced, which is a neurotransmitter calming down excited neurons. Journalists who are writing positively about yoga and showing famous people doing yoga, which helps increase its popularity (Staszewski 2009). There are also articles in the popular press referring to academic authorities that affirm the benevolent influences of yoga on our health (yoga lessens sleeplessness, reduces hypertension, improves insulin administration, and improves breathing, so it can help asthmatics) (Augustyn 2010). One may also find information about public yoga performances, such as a performance by hundreds of supporters in Times Square, New York, including photographs of such events.⁵ There are also articles presenting the results of academic research confirming the positive effects of yoga on many health ailments. For example, in the majority of people yoga reduces anxiety and improves one's mood better than other forms of physical activities, such as taking a walk. This is also due to the increase in the quantity/level of gamma-aminobutyric acid (Stein 2010).

Explanations of exercises (asana) can be found on the Internet or even downloaded onto a mobile phone, so that one can always have with him/her both the instructions as well as a visualization of the exercises. So how do Poles view yoga? According to the studies of Kulmatycki and Burzyński (2008: 168) it seems that in Poland the preferred aspects of yoga are cognitive and recreational. Research on students underlines the importance of the cognitive aspect; they are looking for "something new" in yoga (Kulmatycki, Burzyński 1999). All of this reflects the great focus of the modern world on the body and bodily issues.

The thoughts included in this book are based on empirical qualitative research, and the rules accepted during the research concur with the qualitative sociology model (see: Introduction to Konecki, Chomczyński 2012). The basic rules of qualitative sociology are focused on understanding and explaining social phenomena. As John Dewey has stated:

[T]he world in which we immediately live, that in which we strive, succeed, and are defeated, is preeminently a qualitative world. What we act for, suffer, and

⁵ Joga na Times Square [Yoga in Times Square], *Rzeczpospolita*, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/187143,498263.html> (accessed: 26.06.2010).

enjoy are things in their qualitative determinations. This world forms the field of characteristic modes of thinking, characteristic in that thought is definitely regulated by qualitative considerations (Dewey 1931: 1).

The notion of commonality and common thinking connected with it (commonsense thinking) “that concerned with action and its consequences, whether undergone in enjoyment or suffering, is qualitative” (Dewey 1931: 1). In the epistemological layer, qualities have a subjective and psychological character, referring to the property of “outer objects” defined even with non-qualitative terms (*ibid.*).

Qualitative sociology is for both a perspective of a description, as well as understanding and sometimes even explaining reasons for social phenomenon through empirical research and analysis of individual and group experiences, the definition of the social world and interactions with the usage of qualitative methods of research or qualitative analysis, qualitative and/or quantitative data (Konecki, Chomczyński 2012: 10).

Connections between phenomena in this context can be understood only in reference to some interpretational units, such as in the context of qualitative unit as the general category *becoming a yoga practitioner*.

As described in this publication, research into the doing and practicing of yoga started with participant observation, carried out in one of the yoga schools in a major regional city from the years 2007 to 2011, where the researcher took part in a class at least once a week.⁶ The researcher was also an observer of an outgoing yoga school on four occasions – during a week-long retreat in the mountains where, in seclusion, yoga was practiced for seven hours a day, and additionally there was meditation and mantra singing (in 2008), as well as during three-day-training trips where classes were also intensive, all day long with a 4-hour midday break (plus evening meditation; in 2008–2009). The researcher was then an active participant of the world which he researched. He dwelled together with the participants of the research and practiced hatha-yoga according to the teachers’ recommendations. His psychological and physical sensing of the practice had an influence on his asking of questions during the research process. It can be said that during the group practice there was co-sensing with others of everything that was happening in the exercise room. This co-sensing

⁶ Exercising yoga is understood by me as a physical approach to exercises with the usage of yoga positions (asana). Practising yoga is connected with the notion in which additional attention is given to the psychological effects and partially the spiritual effects connected with the performance of the exercises and gaining knowledge about the philosophy of yoga.

was connected with the work on the body while performing hatha-yoga positions, the instructions given about performed positions, mutual meditation, or group mantra singing, which also causes both bodily and psychological sensations. During common practice, through the observation of one's feelings and undertaking different roles, **interpersonal empathy** appeared, which allowed the researcher to come to understand certain meanings ascribed to hatha-yoga by others. The feeling of the researcher himself was helpful in the interpretation of the data obtained from other sources that were basic sources in the described research (interviews and photographs and video recordings of hatha-yoga practices, observations). However, just the participation in the world of practicing would not, by itself, be enough for the researcher to understand the bodily and mental sensations appearing during the practice. Today, I can say that the practice itself and the imaged submersion in this world where the corporality is so important were essential. Hence, the observations here are directly connected with the experience of the world of the research participants. We used the symbolic interactionist theoretical approach to analyse empirical data (Becker 1982; Prus 1996; Clarke 1991; Strauss 1997).



Fig. 1. Practice and participant observation by the author on the retreat in Pasterka, teacher: Michał Szczepanik from the Hatha-Yoga Centre in Łódź, 2008 (photo by Michał Szczepanik)

During the research, in addition to 200 observational photographs, six video recordings of yoga practices were made. There were also 60 interviews, including thirteen narrative ones, 38 unstructured, and nine movie-elicited interviews. The interlocutors included pupils, students, working people, and yoga instructors, of both sexes. Interviews were done during the breaks of 2008 and 2009, with sociology students from the University of Lodz doing the interviews. The author has been running a participant observation from the year 2007 until the present. Additionally, 172 websites of yoga schools in 38 cities in Poland were analyzed in 2012 in order to examine the strategy and auto-presentational tactics of given schools.

The book begins, in chapter one, with introductions from the perspective of religious studies (Mircea Eliade) and from that of a great practitioner and guru of modern hatha-yoga (B. K. S. Iyengar). Both yoga connoisseurs have different approaches, the former points to many metaphysical and religious aspects of hatha-yoga, while the latter focuses rather on its role in improving health and, what follows, in subduing our everyday life. Yoga, through every day asana practice and a recommended way of nutrition (vegetarianism), results in calming of the mind and the elimination of negative emotions and consequently violence, and becomes a sort of "everyday religion." Modern hatha-yoga can thus be interpreted as para-religious, where there is no faith in supernatural forces, but an interest in ultimate concerns permeates. The problem of transcendence and the change of an individual is defined through the individual him/herself, so it seems that we are dealing here with a "privatized para-religion."

The second chapter describes the social world of yoga practice. Who is the participant of this world; what justifications are built and/or used for participating in it; and what arenas are in it? Arenas are connected with whether yoga should be more of a physical or spiritual practice, who can be a yoga teacher (the problem of certification), and what is the origin of modern hatha-yoga. The participants of hatha-yoga often theorize it, looking for justifications for practicing but sometimes also pointing to its spiritual dimension and, in addition, they analyze and diagnose the state of Western culture. In chapter two points of intersection between the world of yoga practice and other worlds are shown (climbing, conventional and alternative medicine, business, pop-culture). In this chapter a wide historical panorama of the evolution of the current world of hatha-yoga practice is also shown in outline form.

The third chapter presents commonsense definitions of yoga that are constructed by the practitioners individually and for their own

usages. These are often justifications for practicing yoga. The terms and meanings of what yoga is are often taken unknowingly from classical texts about yoga: through the media, yoga schools, classes, informal conversations with teachers, etc.

The fourth chapter deals with the issue of becoming a hatha-yoga practitioner. The process of becoming a practitioner is connected with practices concerning work on the body and its definition, and certain given forms of perception of the body and sensations coming from it. In this chapter, the phases of this process are described: 1) introductory phase - the construction of motives and first steps; 2) phase of fuller recognition of psychophysical effects and adequate meanings ascribed to them; 3) phase of fuller recognition of the spiritual aspects of hatha-yoga. The relation between mind and body becomes complicated in the moment of making a significant commitment to yoga practice and defining bodily practices as both mental and spiritual practices. Work on the body can change the Western perspective of defining the body as a material element of human existence (Cartesian vision) into a vision whereby it is treated as a spiritualized substance (Eastern philosophy vision), which is not always possible when we accept the assumptions of other religions (e.g., Catholicism). In such situations, the changes in the body and psyche have to be defined differently and there should be specific linguistic explanations (often within the scheme of constant language formulas) in order to reconcile the concepts of conventional religion with new spiritual experiences.

In the fifth chapter, research problems connected with the transfer of feelings and phenomena connected with corporality are taken into consideration. In the described research, coaching films on how to practice hatha-yoga were used, which in a realistic, objective way - yet somehow reflecting the physical reality of movements - showed how to perform some exercises (asanas) and sometimes what the consequences of performing a given exercise are for the organism, to see how the practitioners answer the general question: "What do I see and feel when I practice yoga?" In the interviews, based on the movies, interlocutors practicing yoga describe their feelings connected both with doing yoga, as well as the reception of the films. It is then described in what way the passing of knowledge about yoga practice from the aspect of feeling the body is constructed by the practitioners, and also the issue of the visual transfer of yoga practice is taken up.

The sixth chapter shows the work on emotions, which is done through specific physical practices using the body in order to obtain emotional stability, elimination of negative emotions, and achieve mental peace. Work on emotions is shown as an internalizing ritual

of “modern religion,” which is most commonly unseen to an outside observer, and sometimes even to the one working on emotions. The work on emotions in hatha-yoga then has an initiating character, i.e. whether there is a visible change in the individual certified by his/her new interpretation of his/her own emotions and self-feeling. The aim of this part of publication is to show what the work on emotions in yoga practice is, as well as an attempt to interpret the phenomenon in the light of the processes happening in modern Western societies.

In the seventh chapter I deal with the role of the teacher in the yoga-practice role, which is extremely important in the development of the practitioner. According to one of the yoga gurus – B. K. S. Iyengar – the pupil has to have endless trust in his or her teacher. While this is to some extent an idealized conception of the pupil-master relation, nevertheless according to practitioners the teacher is essential in the practice of yoga, as an instructor in physical exercises, and sometimes even as a life guide.

For many practitioners, hatha-yoga has become a style of life – a style in which attention is paid to one’s fitness and mental state and sometimes to one’s own spiritual condition. Practitioners advanced in practice are often faithful to their teachers and to the schools which they attend. Their everyday routine is subdued to yoga, which changed their identity and helps in coping with everyday life as often described by the values of the Western world. From this clash of two cultures comes what we call “modern hatha-yoga,” a very popular form of rest, physical exercises, health practices, and even spiritual practice. Everyone can choose their own interpretation from an array of interpretations, and create for their private usage their own definition of the practice.

CHAPTER 1

Philosophy and hatha-yoga practice Para-religious aspects of hatha-yoga

1.1. Introduction

The explanation of what hatha-yoga is seems a difficult task for a sociologist. I am even more aware, since practicing yoga and observing yoga practitioners and listening to their explanations, of the wide array of common definitions of yoga, as well as the many types of yoga. People who practice different types of yoga usually treat the given type which they practice as the source, and even sometimes as the one and only true source, of that which can be called yoga. While we will deal with the problem of a common definition of yoga by practitioners in Chapter 3, at this point we will examine how yoga is defined by a religious historian and theologian, Mircea Eliade, and a practitioner and theoretician of yoga, Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar, who is a spiritual guardian, teacher, and master (guru) in his own line of yoga teaching, often called Iyengar's School.

Iyengar has created a very buoyant B. K. S. Iyengar's Institute of Yoga in Pune, India, which educates teachers propagating hatha-yoga around the world. Iyengar (December 14, 1918–August 20, 2014) wrote several books that explain his philosophy of yoga and also gave instructions for executing certain asanas (positions) and breathing practices (*pranayama*). During his youth, Iyengar cured himself from many physical ailments and sicknesses through yoga practices (2005a). Maybe this biographical fact established his strong tendency to accent physicality and physical exercises in his concept of hatha-yoga. He is often accused of having a physical approach to yoga. However, in order to level this tendency in his work and in the perception of his school, he wrote a book after 70 years of practice, *Light on Life*, which shows other elements of yoga, accenting more the spirituality of this philosophy, and also translated and explained Patanjali's sutras, which express the essence of yoga and show its spiritual character (Iyengar 2002a; 2005a).

Iyengar was a great propagator of hatha-yoga in the Western world. He visited Great Britain for the first time in 1954 at the