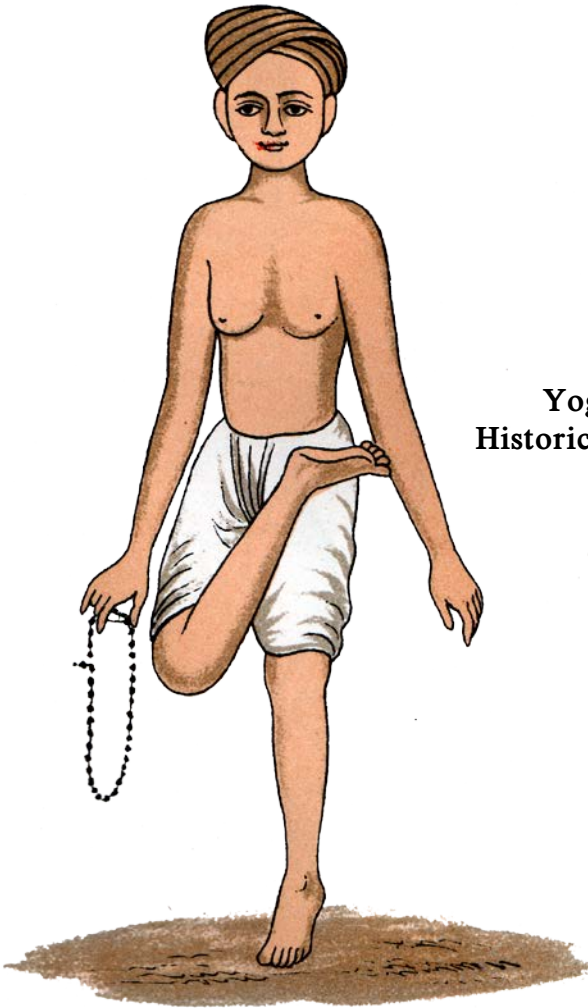


**Abstracts**

Conference on

**Yoga in Transformation:  
Historical and Contemporary  
Perspectives on a  
Global Phenomenon**

September 19–21, 2013  
University of Vienna





**JOSEPH S. ALTER**  
**(University of Pittsburgh, U.S.A.)**

**Indian Yoga and German Nature Cure: Parochial Philosophies, Prāṇāyāma and the Provincialization of Modernity**

In the context of 20th century colonialism and the yoga renaissance the significant influence of the health reform movement, Muscular Christianity and athleticism on the development of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* is now clearly documented and well understood. As one might expect the lines of cross-cultural exchange connected India to England, but also to the United States in terms of itinerate yogis going west and athletic missionaries and body builders such as Eugene Sandow coming east. However, probably the most significant influence on the development of yoga as therapy came by way of Germany. Given the fact that Nature Cure involves the exclusive therapeutic use of earth, water, sunlight and air, it is almost as though late 19th century advocates for hydrotherapy and heliotherapy in southern Germany couldn't have imagined anything more perfect than *prāṇāyāma* for the medicalized use of fresh air. In part this helps to explain why Nature Cure fit almost seamlessly into the rubric of early 20th century nationalist health reform in India. However, the story is more interesting and complicated, with respect to the exchange of ideas and degrees of philosophical and cultural transposition. In terms of what might be called a recursive provincialization of modernity, this paper will focus on parochial philosophies of nature and the environment that link a political ecology of health in 20th century India to different dimensions of German romanticism, which was, of course, linked to ancient "Hindu philosophy" through the intellectual trajectory of Orientalism in an earlier era. Underlying this, it will be argued, was the overarching problematic of Nature in the context of both European and South Asian modernity, and the relationship between the body and ecology in mediating the boundary between natural and unnatural domains and a host of corollary distinctions.

# **ANAND AMALADASS**

## **(Sacred Heart College, Chennai, India)**

### **Christian Response to Yoga**

The title of this paper needs to be qualified, since there is a complex history of mixed responses ranging from enthusiastic or cautious approaches to hostile reactions. There is no such thing as the Christian response. Today not only some modern protestant evangelicals are opposed to it, but also the Roman Catholic Church officially issued a warning against yoga through a letter to the Catholic bishops in 1989. In his book on Hinduism (1992), David Burnett summed up the variety of opinions on yoga found among Christians. Even so, Jean-Marie Dechanet's writings on yoga (1956) played a great role in promoting a positive view on yoga and had considerable impact on the Christian community, also in India. As a result, Christian individuals and groups took to the practice of yoga seriously, and their writings bear witness to the fact that they profited personally from it.

For different reasons, writers like Harvey Cox and Agehananda Bharati were averse to "Westerners" taking recourse to Asian methods of prayers and meditation in general. Alan Watts (1972) points out the theological background for the Christian resistance to yoga.

Yoga itself has gone through several interpretations. Hindu, Jaina, Buddhist, New Age and Christian traditions have deconstructed and reconstructed it anew. And even now the adaptation of yoga continues at various levels and it has thus become the heritage of mankind.

**KARL BAIER,**  
**(University of Vienna, Austria)**

**Yoga and the Viennese Occult Revival**

The flourishing of occultism in Vienna between 1880 and 1914 is connected with the popularity of theosophy, psychical research and spiritism. It also comprises activities of masonic lodges, magical orders and esoteric *völkisch* groups. Many occultists shared a deep interest in the teachings and practices of Eastern religions and especially in yoga, which was understood as a practice to cultivate occult powers. Some of these occultists not only studied translations of Indian works on yoga, but also experimented with practical exercises. Furthermore, at least two Indians who at that time were considered to be yoga experts were in contact with members of the Viennese occult scene: Bheema Sena Pratapa and Sri Agamya Guru Paramahansa. This paper will explore the role of yoga within the occult milieu of the period by investigating the biography and work of important protagonists such as Franz Hartmann, Friedrich Eckstein, and Karl Kellner. Particular emphasis will be laid on the relation between the occultistic discourse on yoga, academic psychology and psychoanalysis.

## IAN BAKER

(University College London, U.K.)

### Yogic Practice in Tibetan Buddhism as Revealed in Pema Lingpa's "Secret Key to Channels, Winds, and Inner Essences"

Yogic practices associated with physical movement (*'khrul 'khor*), expansion of the breath (*rlung gom*), and cultivation of inner vitality (*thig le*) are central to the transmission of Vajrayāna Buddhism from India to Tibet from the eleventh century onward, yet have been kept largely hidden due to a monastic culture emphasising ritual and textual recitation. Even Dzogchen (*rdzogs chen*), the so-called "Great Perfection" teachings of Tibet which point directly to the "self-liberating" potential of human consciousness, involve forceful Hathayoga-related movements and breathing techniques that push physiology – and thereby consciousness – beyond accustomed limits towards the awakening of habitually dormant perceptual and existential capacities. Tibet's long-hidden yogic practices are vividly portrayed in a series of late seventeenth-century murals in a once secret meditation chamber in Lhasa conceived during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The wall paintings illustrate a Dzog-chen "treasure text" (*gter ma*) revealed two centuries earlier by Tertön Orgyen Pema Lingpa (1450–1521) and ascribed to Padmasambhava, the "Lotus Born" sage credited with having established Vajrayāna Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century. Embellished with illuminating passages from Pema Lingpa's "Compendium of Enlightened Spontaneity" (*Rdzogs chen kun bzang dgongs 'dus*), the Lukhang murals portray a range of yogic practices (*rtsa rlung 'khrul 'khor*) held to liberate both mind and body in the realisation of one's inherent "Buddha Nature" (*de gshegs snying po*, Skt: *tathāgatagarbha*). This presentation focuses on illustrative details from the Lukhang murals to bring renewed attention to the yogic practices of *āsana*, *mudrā*, and *prāṇāyāma* that underlie Tibet's Buddhist lineages and the ways in which physiology and perception pushed beyond habitual constraints through Hathayoga-like exercises lie at the heart of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This talk will also address the ways in which increasing focus on "Tibetan Yoga" is revitalising Vajrayāna Buddhism transnationally in light of contemporary interest in pro-somatic spiritual disciplines.

**JASON BIRCH**  
**(Oxford University, U.K.)**

**Unpublished Manuscript Evidence for the Practice of Many Āsanas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

Numerous scholars have noted that the myriad postures (*āsana*) of modern yoga are not to be found in the well-known scriptures of Haṭhayoga. This has prompted some to assert that relatively few *āsanas* were practiced in Haṭhayoga and those we see today are largely the invention of twentieth-century Indian gurus. There is certainly some truth in these assertions, but they need to be assessed in the light of two unpublished manuscripts which indeed contain long lists of *āsanas*. The first is a seventeenth-century manuscript of the *Yogacintāmaṇi* which has a section on *āsana* added to the original text by the same scribe. The additional section consists of a list of over one hundred *āsanas* as well as a description of fifty-four of them. The second is an early-eighteenth century manuscript from Rajasthan that contains an extended version of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and describes over one hundred *āsanas*. In this paper, I shall compare the *āsanas* in these unpublished works to those of the *Haṭharatnāvalī* and the *Jogapradīpyakā*. It is apparent that brief references to eighty-four *āsanas* in early Haṭhayoga literature are replaced by actual lists and descriptions of eighty-four *āsanas* after the sixteenth century. During this time in the history of yoga, earlier traditions were synthesised and more scholarly compilations were composed. The types of *āsanas* seen in these compilations provide clear precedents to the floor and inverted postures in modern Indian yoga.

## MAYA BURGER

(University of Lausanne, Switzerland)

### **Sāṃkhya Interpretation in a Transnational Perspective: Śrī Anirvāṇa and Lizelle Reymond**

The biographies of Śrī Anirvāṇa (Bengali author, 1896–1978) and Lizelle Reymond (a Swiss orientalist, disciple and translator of Anirvāṇa’s writings, 1899–1994) illustrate in a paradigmatic way the tight connections between India and Europe in the modern interpretation of yoga. In this presentation, the dynamics and mechanics of their encounter will be analyzed from the perspective of the “connected history”, seen as an antidote to euro-centred or nationalistic histories. Anirvāṇa belongs to a class of Bengalis that is impregnated by composite cultures and characteristic of his time. Steeped in local traditions (Baul), he has a classical training (Sanskrit) and is interested in modern science and works with authors reflecting the confluence of cultures; he translated, for instance, the work of Aurobindo into Bengali. Lizelle Reymond is an orientalist who introduced, together with Jean Herbert (she was his first wife), Europe to the spiritualities of India in the first half of the 20th century, founding the book series that later became *Les spiritualités vivantes* (Albin Michel, publisher). The writings of the two authors will be analyzed with regard to their descriptions of the concepts of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and their biographies compared, with a view to determine the importance of transnational biographies as vectors to understand the modern history of yoga.



**BEATRIX HAUSER**

**(Alpen-Adria-University of Klagenfurt, Austria)**

**Bodily Practices from Afar: Global Flows and Cultural Interferences in Postural Yoga**

In the last decade several new insights were gained regarding the ways in which modern postural yoga evolved and how it was disseminated around the world, taking a variety of different forms and directions in the process. Today it seems to be evident that yoga has become a global phenomenon. In this paper, I shall consider some of the underlying assumptions in conceptualizing yoga as an example of global interrelatedness. What implications are involved when yoga practitioners and/or academic scholars refer to overlapping networks of people and practices, to only one or to various yoga worlds, and to imagined transnational communities and ideologies? How do we conceive of dynamic processes commonly labelled as cultural flow? In particular, I shall focus on bodily practices associated with Neo-Hatha Yoga (e.g., *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*) as a kind of technology that is appropriated across national, cultural and religious boundaries. This corpus of practices is propagated on the basis of two assumptions: first, their association with deep meaning, and second their universal efficacy. Drawing on some ethnographic examples, I shall argue that the translocal dissemination of bodily practices differs from other kinds of global diffusion in a significant way. Human beings cannot assess bodily sensations by themselves, rather body perception is inherently relational: referring to forms of previous experiences, to specific social contexts, and to personal and collective memory. In this respect, the experience of postural yoga resists mimesis. Thus, the evaluation of one's own bodily reactions and improvement is highly contextual and cultural rather than global.

## CATHARINA KIEHNLE (Leipzig University, Germany)

### Songs on Meditation from the Jñāndev Gāthā

Compared to the songs by Tukārām, the ones by Jñāndev are less popular in Maharashtra, notwithstanding the high estimation the 13th-century poet enjoys among the Marāṭhī speaking Hindu population. The songs called “Haripāṭh” and the *abhaṅgas* interpreted by the famous singer Latā Maṅgeśkar are indeed well known, but the great bulk of the about 1250 songs collected in the “Jñāndev Gāthā” is more or less unknown to a greater public. This may have several reasons. The songs only partly appeal to folk-piety and common sense in the way the Tukārām songs do, the philosophy and yoga they describe are remote from ideas cherished by the average pious, and many of them are poorly transmitted because of their difficult contents. With the help of some newly found manuscripts, I want to examine a group of songs dealing mainly with the perception of blackness and of the colour blue during meditation. One of the questions that arise (and perhaps can be answered only with a limited degree of certainty) is whether the texts are based on personal experiences or on poetical conventions connected with the Nāths, or the God Viṭṭhala of Paṇḍharpūr. It will also be interesting to explore the views of the yogi poet(s) on the mind, consciousness and meditation that produce perceptions of colour and other phenomena of light as well as subsequent feelings of unity with the highest brahman.

**ANNE KOCH**  
**(University of Munich, Germany)**

**“It’s Time to Give Back!” Competitive Charity in Today’s Global Yoga**

“It’s time to give back!” is part of the founding myth of the Yoga Aid World Challenge, an event – in its fifth year now – of public yoga practice of hundreds and thousands of people across nearly thirty countries worldwide on a specific day. An Indian yoga guru uttered the cited claim, and an Australian-Japanese yoga teacher couple interpreted it as a call to go for donations through yoga practice and invented this global fundraising event. The event is remarkable in many regards: yoga teacher teams compete for donations. The practicing of *āsanas* takes mostly place in public spaces, with hundreds of people practicing at the same time. Donations of 1,48 Million Euro were transferred to charities as recently as September 2012. The talk will examine the political economy of this new global niche of yoga. What makes neoliberal elements, such as competition, permeate this yoga, and why is self-centeredness supplemented by altruistic behaviour also resulting in monetary contributions? How can these findings be interpreted? Has this emerging global yoga to be conceived as part of a charity culture that reacts on the present crisis of the financial markets and on feelings of insecurity and interconnectedness?

**PHILIPP A. MAAS**  
**(University of Vienna, Austria)**

**On Postures in the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra**

The oldest surviving systematic exposition of yoga philosophy, the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra (ca. fourth century CE), is composed of two different layers of text. The first layer consists of brief phrases, so-called *sūtras* which probably are at least in part a compilation of older textual materials. Within the Pātañjala Yogaśāstra (PYŚ), the *sūtras* frequently serve as starting points for more detailed discussions of relevant topics in the second layer, the so-called *bhāṣya*. Accordingly, the *sūtra* and *bhāṣya*-passages of the PYŚ form a unified whole that is the result of the single intention of a compiler and author named Patañjali. In the present paper, I take a fresh look at the exposition of posture as an ancillary of yoga in PYŚ 2.46-48. This passage contains the famous characterization of posture as *sthīrasukham*, which was understood in various ways by the Sanskrit-commentators and by modern scholars and translators. By weighting these interpretations against each other and by drawing upon different textual versions of the passage under discussion as they are transmitted partly in unpublished manuscripts, I hope to arrive at an improved understanding of Patañjali's conceptions of what postures are, how they are achieved and which purposes they serve.

**JAMES MALLINSON**  
**(Oxford University, U.K.)**

**Yoga and Sex: What is the Purpose of Vajroli Mudrā?**

Media commentators have explained away recent sex scandals in schools of modern yoga as inevitable because of physical yoga's origins in tantric sex cults. Scholarship on yoga has, in the main, supported this view. Yet philological analysis of the texts of Haṭhayoga shows its techniques to be a blend of visualisation-based non-physical tantric yoga with the physical techniques of an older ascetic tradition in which celibacy was paramount. This paper seeks to examine attitudes towards sex in haṭhayogic texts by focussing on *vajroli mudrā*, the technique of urethral suction, the aim of which is commonly understood to be the absorption of commingled sexual fluids. Analyses of its descriptions in the early haṭhayogic corpus show, however, that this is anomalous; in the majority of texts the purpose of the *vajroli mudrā* is sexual continence. Furthermore, ethnographic and medical investigation suggests that it is physiologically impossible to absorb the products of sexual intercourse through the penis while copulating: a catheter is required. The texts of Haṭhayoga brought the previously secret techniques of celibate ascetics to a householder audience and had to adjust their aims accordingly. In conclusion, this paper will summarise this process and the texts' explicit pronouncements on sex.

**MEERA NANDA**

**(Indian Institute of Science Education and Research,  
Chandigarh, India)**

**Pseudoscience and Resemblance Thinking in the Construction of  
Modern Yoga**

Notable cognitive scientists including the Noble Prize winner psychologist Daniel Kahneman, and computational scientist Paul Thagard, along with Religious Studies scholar Brian K. Smith, have highlighted the role of analogical thinking in fostering cognitive illusions and pseudo-scientific thinking. This paper will examine the role of analogical thinking in the popular Indian tendency to claim the authority of modern science for the spiritual wisdom of yoga. Special attention will be paid to the works of Swami Vivekananda, who started the tradition of interpreting Patañjali's Yogasūtras through analogies with theories of biological evolution and thermodynamics. The contemporary uses of resemblance or analogical thinking in the modernization of yoga will be the focus of this paper.

# **SUZANNE NEWCOMBE**

**(Inform, based at the London School of Economics, U.K.)**

## **Spaces for Yoga**

Yoga has been offered in outdoor public parks, classrooms, church halls, gymnasiums, sports centres, adapted buildings, purpose-built studios, on television, in books, and in private rooms amongst other spaces. The requirements of these various locations have been influential in shaping the contemporary practice of yoga. This paper will explore key places where yoga has been practiced with a focus on Britain from the twentieth century to the present. The varying demands on yoga placed by “secular” state-funded education authorities and “landlords” of rented spaces will be contrasted with yoga as done in private homes. The paper will advance an argument that the artists’ studio could be seen as a prototype for the ideal modern yoga practice space, as space to be filled with creativity and transformation. It will also explore the self-conscious positioning of yoga practitioners in places of particular cultural meaning by drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Marion Goldman’s concept of spiritual privilege. The research will be grounded in historical records and supplemented by interviews with contemporary practitioners about the nature of the spaces in which they practice and teach.

# MARION RASTELLI

(Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria)

## Yoga in the Daily Routine of the Pāñcarātrins

As other tantric traditions, the Vaiṣṇava tradition of Pāñcarātra utilizes yoga and yogic techniques in various contexts and for manifold purposes. For example, it uses yogic techniques in rituals in order to purify the subject, i.e. the worshipper, as well as objects used for worship. Another example is the practice of yoga outside a ritual context in order to reach the two classical goals of a Pāñcarātrin, liberation (*mukti*) from transmigration and worldly pleasure (*bhukti*). Characteristic for the Pāñcarātra, however, is the practice of yoga in a special context, namely, within the framework of the religious rites of the “five time periods” (*pañca kāla*). The five time periods are a daily routine that is presented as obligatory for Pāñcarātrins in the tradition’s authoritative texts at least since the 12th century CE. These five time periods, which structure a Pāñcarātrin’s entire day, consist of the following parts: “approaching” (*abhigamana*), “appropriating” (*upādāna*), worship (*ijyā*), studying (*svādhyāya*), and yoga. The final time period, yoga, completes the day and is practiced either before falling asleep or at midnight after an initial phase of sleep. This paper will examine the prescriptions for this yogic practice as found in the Pāñcarātra Saṃhitās and in Veṅkaṭanātha’s Pāñcarātrarakṣā, focusing on the particular nature of this type of yoga and the time that is prescribed for its practice.



**MARK SINGLETON**

**(St. John's College, New Mexico, U.S.A.)**

**Evaluating Modern Yoga and its Relationship to the Past**

This paper offers some thoughts on the ways in which new understandings of yoga's past can inform our thinking about its globalised present. How should ongoing research into the pre-modern textual history of yoga reshape our understanding of yoga in the modern world? In what ways has the academic study of yoga in modernity contributed to revealing continuities and ruptures with the practices and self-understandings of the yoga tradition? And should this be considered as its primary contribution? Can modern yoga be studied on its own terms, as some have claimed, without reference to pre-modernity, or is there an obligation to reflect on it in the light of tradition? The paper will examine and evaluate some modern expressions of Haṭhayoga in the light of current research into Haṭhayoga's early textual history, from formulations of characteristically haṭhayogic *mudrās* in the eleventh-century *Amṛtasiddhi*, to its c. 1450 *locus classicus*, the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. It will also briefly inquire into subsequent pre-colonial developments of Haṭhayoga, and offer some thoughts on their relevance for a reconsideration of the global "modern yoga renaissance". This is intended as a provisional reflection on new research departures.

**NOÉMIE VERDON**  
**(University of Lausanne, Switzerland)**

**Bīrūnī's Choices of Interpretation and Methods in His Kitāb Pātanjal**

This paper sets forth some features of one of Bīrūnī's works entitled Kitāb Bātanġal al-Hindī (The Book of Bātanjal the Indian, also commonly referred to as the Kitāb Pātanjal). Among the scant literature on this translation, there is agreement about the fact that there are notable differences between the Kitāb Pātanjal and Sanskrit literature on yoga known to us. This raises the question about the extent to which this work is a literal translation, and of what text. Some of these differences can certainly be explained as Bīrūnī's own modifications and choices of interpretation; however, these choices have not yet been satisfactorily determined by scholars. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to throw light on some choices that Bīrūnī made when he decided to translate a yoga text associated with Patañjali into Arabic. Reflexions on the transformations due to these choices provide information on the form of the Sanskrit original text on the one hand and of the Arabic text on the other. The reasons, circumstances and consequences of Bīrūnī's choices will be dealt with, as well as his method of translation. Prospects and limitations in the determination of Bīrūnī's transformation of the original text will also be discussed. Thus, this first philological analysis aims at laying the foundation for a future examination of Bīrūnī's understanding of the yoga system of Patañjali.

**DAVID WHITE**

**(University of California, Santa Barbara, U.S.A.)**

**“Classical Yoga”? The Fall and Rise of the Yoga Sūtras**

It is something of a scholarly convention to refer to the yoga system of the Yoga Sūtras as classical yoga. However, an examination of the reception history of this work indicates that apart from a 500-year period between the eighth and twelfth centuries approximately, the Yoga Sūtras were rarely attested in South Asian sources. The work is the subject of very few commentaries, and attracted only limited attention in South Asian intellectual circles (which were largely limited to Kashmir and Tamilnadu, and this most likely due to mythological traditions regarding a certain Patañjali). Most striking is the utter neglect of Patañjali's system in the Puranic and Smṛti canons, which appear to censor not only Patañjali's name, but also the title of his work, and any discussion of yoga philosophy from their many chapters devoted to yoga. It is only since its "rediscovery" by the British Orientalist Henry Thomas Colebrooke and subsequent appropriation by Swami Vivekananda that Patañjali's work has been elevated to "classical" status. My presentation will outline the Yoga Sūtra's reception history, relying mainly on quantitative data to make the case that, prior to the nineteenth century, the work lay in relative oblivion throughout much of its history. In the light of these data, the identification of the work as a system of "classical yoga" is highly questionable.

# DOMINIK WUJASTYK

(University of Vienna, Austria)

## Some Problematic Yoga Sūtras and their Buddhist Background

In this paper, I discuss a small selection of sūtras from the Pātañjalayogaśāstra (PYŚ) that are sometimes misunderstood, or mistakenly considered problematic, by contemporary interpreters and even some of the earliest commentators. Some of these interpretative difficulties arise out of a lack of specific historical knowledge, especially of the language and content of early Buddhist literature. Several of the interpretations I shall present are not entirely new to indological studies, but their importance has been overlooked by some recent interpreters. The pioneering study by Émil Senart published in 1900 argued compellingly that the Pātañjalayogaśāstra and the Pāli Tipiṭaka contained passages and concepts that were either parallel or even conceptually identical. De La Vallée Poussin (1937) continued Senart's work, and revealed further strong influences of Buddhism discernible in the PYŚ. With this background, I shall clarify some points of interpretation and discuss selected sūtras from the point of view of their value as diagnostic tests for the quality of scholars' understandings and translations of early yoga texts. I shall give special attention to the historical background to the technical terms *dharmamegha*, *asaṃpramoṣa*, and *anantasamāpatti*.

## Presentation

### **HANS-JÖRG WEBER**

**(BDY, Professional Association of Yoga Teachers,  
Germany)**

#### **BDY and the Situation of Yoga Teachers in Germany**

Over the last decades, Yoga has increased in social significance in Germany. Furthermore, in the late 1960s, a professionalisation of yoga teaching took place. Nevertheless, the yoga teacher has not yet been the subject of empirical investigation.

The subject of the lecture will be an analysis of the oldest and largest professional association, the Professional Association of Yoga Teachers in Germany ([www.yoga.de](http://www.yoga.de)), which is open to adherents of all yoga traditions. The design of the empirical study is based on the questionnaire of the “General Population Survey of the Social Sciences in Germany” ([www.gesis.org/allbus](http://www.gesis.org/allbus)). Since 1980, a representative cross-section of the German population is regularly surveyed using a set of constant and variable questions.

The issues addressed in the questionnaire have been integrated into the BDY yoga teacher survey (Weber 2008). Thus, the results of the BDY yoga teacher survey can be compared to those of the survey of the German population in general.





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