St. Stephen's College

Union and Communion:
A Heuristic Inquiry into the Practice of Presence and the Experience of the Holy

By

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Abstract

This thesis explored how the practice of presence has impacted the experience of the Holy. As a heuristic process, the scope of the research was limited to the person of the researcher. This included all aspects of life for the researcher as all dimensions of human experience are available to different degrees of presence, just as the Holy may be revealed through any dimension of experience. The primary method of practicing presence took place through the practice of Yoga. The traditional Yoga practice of eight limbs was focused through a heuristic research method involving six stages, which brought familiar academic form to the process and structured the exposition of the findings. Practicing presence was significant in the recognition of personal barriers and transforming the vision of the practitioner. Presence was required to discern between what was transient and personal from what was enduring and transpersonal. This exploration revealed a deep relational nature to the experience of the Holy. Difference, separation, otherness, and the idea of the wholly other as a conception of the Holy emerged as the dimensional fields for relationship. Relationship in all dimensions of being—physical, psychological, emotional, social, political, and spiritual—bridge the separation between our lived experience in nature and the dimensions of deeper ontological meaning. The specific content of the experience of the Holy remains nevertheless illusive, as it may be manifest only to understanding through the transient terms of human experience. We remain only singular participants in the relationship with what transcends our limitations or separations.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks to Dr.Mona-Lee Feehan for all her guidance, support, patience, and friendship in the crucible of this lengthy and difficult process. I would like to thank Dr. William Close for lighting in me a theological “fire” all those years ago in the Montreal airport and also to thank Rev. Peggy McDonough for throwing fresh wood on that fire many years later.

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Glossary of Sanskrit Terms[1]

Abhinivesha: Attachment to continuance of the status quo; fear of death

Abhyasa: Practice

Ahimsa: First *yama* or self-restraint; non-violence or non-violation

Aparigraha: Fourth *yama* or self-restraint; non- grasping; resisting greed

Asana: Practice of physical postures; the third limb described in the yoga sutras

Asmita: Second *klesha* or hinderance; the sense of a separate self

Asteya: Third *yama* or self-restraint; not stealing

Atman: Soul

Avidya: First *klesha* or hinderance; the source of all other hinderances; ignorance or not seeing

Brahmacharia: Containment

Brahman: Vastness

Buddhi: Understanding, integrated intellect, awareness

Chitta; Heart/mind complex or psyche

Dharana: Concentration

Dhyana: Meditation

Dvesha: Aversion to suffering

Ekagrata: One-pointed attention

Ishvara pranidhana: Devotion to God

Kleshas: Hinderances to liberation

[1] Ravi Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras: A New Translation and Guide (Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Pess, 2009)

Manas: Base mind extended from the senses, reason

Niyama: Second limb of yoga described in the sutras; observances

Prakriti: All of transient nature, material and conceptual

Prana: Breath; life force; animating energy; spiritual energy

Pranayama: Regulation of breath

Pratyahara: Withdrawal of the senses

Purusha: Eternal, unchanging, pure consciousness

Raga: Third *klesha* or hinderance; attachment to pleasure

Samadhi: Free attention; identity of subject and object of attention

Samkhya: One of the pillars of Indian philosophy; attributed to Ishvara Krisna; closely associated with interpretation of Yoga sutras

Santosa: Contentment

Samyama: Simultaneous practice of all three internal limbs described in the sutras

Satya: Second *yama* or self-restraint; truth, honesty

Saucha: First *nyama* or observance; purity

Sthira: Steadiness

Sukham: Ease

Svadyaya: Self Study; study of Scriptures

Tapas: Vigor, heat, energetic motivation

Vairagya: Non-attachment; non-identification

Vasanas: Latent subconscious potentialities / impressions

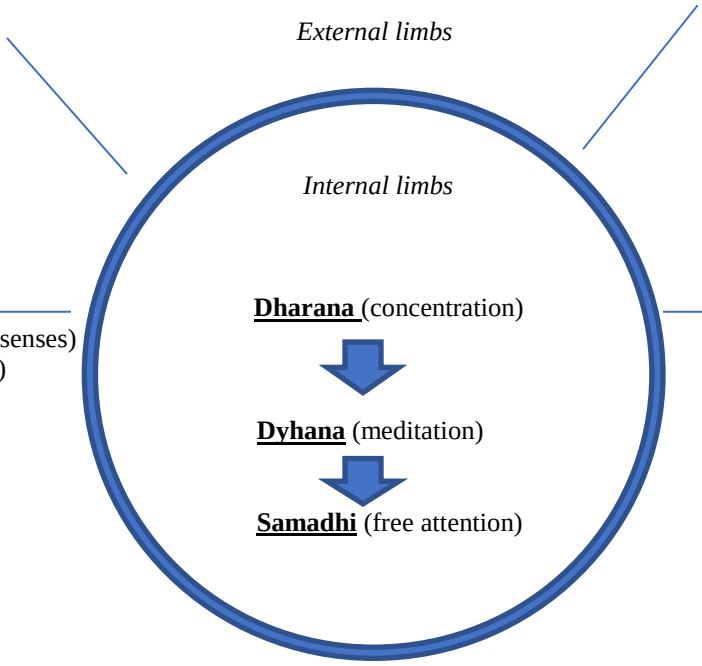
Vrittis: Movements of the mind or heart

Yama: First limb of yoga described in the sutras; self-restraints

Eight Limbs of Yoga

Yama
Ahimsa (non-violence)
Satya (honesty)
Asteya (not stealing)
Brahmacharia (containment/non- indulgence)
Aparigraha (non-grasping/greed)
God)

Niyama
Saucha (purity)
Santosa (contentment)
Tapas (Heat/ effort)
Svadyaya (self study)
Ishvara Pranidhana (devotion to



Pratyahara
(withdrawal of the senses)
(posture/alignment)

Asana

Pranayama
(regulation of breath)

Kleshas (hinderances) *May disrupt any of the practices of the eight limbs.*
- Avida (ignorance)
- Asmita (sense of separate self)
- Raga (attraction)
- Dvesha (aversion)
- Abhinivesha (attachment to the status quo)

Chapter One

The Field

The world has changed. It has grown bigger and more complicated with each passing year of my experience. In the beginning, when I was small, changes were managed by the protective field of my community. My family and their faith were my protective bubble. That sphere, in turn, was insulated by my immediate family's expanded community of kinships, friendships, and shared cultural understandings.

The world has changed. There used to be boundaries on the playing field, but now the lines are blurred by the markings for different games from different traditions. It is difficult to tell what is in or out of bounds. It feels as if we are calling our own fouls, but everyone is playing by different rules. Where I used to naively take for granted that my cultural visioning of things represented some sort of objective universal value, now I find myself wandering the global cultural landscape of the twenty-first century. I find myself in an open meadow populated by all manner of weeds and wildflowers alike. I dropped the ball somewhere, and the grass has grown tall enough to hide it.

In this changed world, I nevertheless must make my way. Humility requires that I be receptive to that which is beyond my immediate sphere which is, after all, quite transparent in this age of social media and ubiquitous hand-held computer devices. There is no place to hide. Unless I disengage from the world, I cannot help but see far more than comfort could wish. I feel exposed and vulnerable with every swipe of the finger or click of the mouse.

I would not abandon my faith in the merit of my upbringing as have so many others. But neither can I with any integrity accept it at face value as being more than merely

personal or, at best, only of local significance. Somehow the experience of personal change in a changing world, the experience of transformation, needs to be distilled into what is most essential. Somehow my feeling of the universal significance of my particular faith experience needs to be redeemed. The boundary is crossed. The bubble is broken. There is no going back the same way I came.

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I was wrestling with Christianity one day. In a moment of pause, I searched my heart for what was most essential to the experience of my faith tradition. There was no pause; I knew the answer as I asked the question: the Holy. What is interesting to me is that I knew the answer with such certainty, yet had only a vague sense of what it meant. The Holy is in fact mysterious, beautiful, and perhaps terrible; it is what I long for most of all and fear the most deeply. The Holy is only intuited most of the time like a fleeting glimpse out of the corner of my eye, or something I know that I know but cannot quite recall. Yet occasionally, it lands on me with both feet like the vastness of geological time, or a rapturous flight on the wings of music. The Holy is illusive, and this is why I wrestle with my tradition: to try to grasp what slips through my fingers, to understand what I think I hear, to have the courage to stare into the sun.

What occurs to me is that the challenge of the Holy is not any idea of it or what it might mean to my mind, but the nature of its presence. It seems to either escape too soon or threaten to swallow me whole. Somehow, I need to be present to its fleeting movement so as not to miss it when it is subtle. In the same breath, I need to be able to remain present when it crashes down with overwhelming weight. To experience the Holy as presence and not just an idea, one needs to be present to one's self. In one sense, the

Holy may be completely other, yet the one thing it has in common with my finite human experience is where we meet. The Holy is met through mutual presence or communion as a metaphysical condition.

The Lost Ball

I cannot manipulate the Holy. It is out of my hands. I do have the ability to take hold of myself. I can shape my organism in ways which render me more or less receptive. Religious life, throughout history, has developed codes of behaviour, attitudes towards self and society, and symbols as bearers of meaning which evoke the experience of mystery and depth like the sacramental sense of communion. Some of these methods are designed to align the practitioner with what is beyond the scope of normal experience, what eludes even language, what is wholly other. Through such methods hearts and minds and deeds are hopefully tuned to be resonant with that which lies beyond our grasp yet underlies everything we might do or be.

Christian tradition is my reference point. Even if I find the world full of people who describe themselves as Christians yet who hold beliefs and engage in practices which seem altogether alien to my understanding, I still understand the world and connection to the Holy in terms derived from the Christian tradition. There is an ambiguity that has crept into my relationship to formal church. My experience of the dissonance and variety of visions in the Church has led me to the unsettling position where Christianity comes to no longer represent *the way* in any exclusive sense to me. Now I find it to be only *one way* among many. It is a movable centre

Yet, there is reality for me in Christianity. The challenge is to find ways through which I can live with the old stories in a new way. To do this I have to make them

relevant to my experience of multiculturalism and the landscape of various wisdom traditions in the world. I have to be able to move through the experience of heterogeneity in the world and be able to discern freely and authentically which path to take. The maps of memory and tradition must be read in a present light if they are to be any help. In a sense, in order for my faith tradition to be of guidance here and now, I have to let it go.

It is not without a sense of irony that this letting go strikes a chord with the program of behavior and mode of understanding described in the scriptural accounts of Jesus' teaching. Leaving the traditional economic spheres of everyday activity, dissolving the norms of social boundaries concerning appropriate associations, and revisioning the structure of traditional religious wisdom and relations of power are all spheres of letting go which, I was taught, the Church enjoined us to make real in our lives.

Today, the challenge is the same in many ways. The temptation is to hoard rather than share, discriminate rather than welcome. We hide behind anachronistic schemas of wisdom to justify ourselves as we are. A program discerning and pursuing justice in the world is still required. And a centering reference point from which to begin is also required, lest we be just awash in a sea of relative values and interchangeable descriptive models. This reference point cannot be bound to a particular cultural, historic, or linguistic tradition; it must be shared by, and yet be, beyond them all. The Holy is a cross-cultural experience. It has a universality regardless of the particulars of tradition. Yet, it is not in our control. All that we can do is prepare ourselves to be receptive. All that we can do is be present to the possibility of the presence of the Holy.

I have developed an affinity with the practice of presence derived from the Yoga tradition. Yoga may be translated from Sanskrit to mean union. This is not a particular

religious affiliation. Yoga is not, in itself, a religion, but a spiritual technology designed to hone discernment. By this I mean that Yoga is a complex of techniques which engage the entire psychosomatic organism towards discernment of our nature in the order of the cosmos. This discernment is for the cultivation of presence and, ultimately, to prepare for the possibility of union or communion with the Holy. This junction is important theologically as it is unclear in what way this is even possible. If the Holy were wholly other, how can we be in communion with, let alone be one with, the Holy? Yet, that is the practice and the goal in living prayerfully from the heart in thought and word and deed.

Question

What is the experience of practicing presence in relation to the Holy?

The Winding Path to the Question

I grew up in a progressive United Church community. My grandfather was a United Church minister. I have struggled both for and against my traditional upbringing throughout my adult life. I have struggled with what ought to make more sense in the body of inherited teachings, old habits and practices and also for what ought not to attempt any reasonable explanation, the ineffable mystery at the heart of faith. At the heart of the matter is the recognition of the syncretic nature of the early church and our inheritance of its described path.

From the roots of emerging orthodoxy in the formation of the early church, through the divergence of the many variations that Church has undergone, much of what was once formative or at least a part of doctrine and definition in Christian life has been edited out

of the formal fold of the church. I discovered this as an undergraduate student pursuing medieval philosophy. Many times, I found myself thinking: "This seems like it is from another world," when really it was from another time and place of the tradition I thought I knew. I grew up in a particular denomination and yet intuit and feel the need for cohesion and universality in what is such a variable notion as Christianity. Yet these experiences of difference, forgotten or repressed contributions, represent missing pieces to my wholeness. In particular, gnostic components to this faith I have inherited seek expression, yet they are without voice beyond the echoes of recovered ancient texts.

When I begin to question what I believe and why I believe it in a mature and discerning manner, I take my destiny into my own hands. I can no longer take anything for granted however soothing and blissful the temptation to go back to sleep. I have begun to mold my life and my community in the most powerful and subversive sense. By many accounts, this was the way for the first followers of Christ. The earliest followers of Christ were challenged to abandon their attachments to comfort and instead to comfort each other without discrimination. They were challenged to relinquish that which was transitory in favour of that which was of eternal significance. Family, wealth, status, traditional social norms, all were to be left by the wayside for the sake of a new vision of something that Christ advocated was immanent all along for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear.

To me, this seems rather inspiring on the surface, but soon reveals itself to be a profound challenge hanging by a thread assurance. How do I cultivate the vision to see? How do I learn to hear differently? Where does the discipline come from to give up the delicious irrelevancies of this world in favor of what seems just outside my grasp but

within my reach? Traditionally, the answers were sought in the catacombs of scripture, coded in metaphor, and guarded by clerical interpreters.

St. John of the Cross was an example of this tradition. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*[2] describes in more or less opaque terms a process of spiritual discipline through hardship and doubt by which one may prepare to be united with God. If natural knowledge or discursive reflection are engaged, "harm and difficulty" arise through the things of the natural world, the devil, and the hindrance this type of knowledge causes to divine union.[2] If explicit knowledge and logical discourse or reason are obstacles, then St. John must be speaking of a very different type of knowing.

The *Cloud of Unknowing*[3] is a mystical text from around 500 C.E. attributed to an anonymous author, or Dionysius the Areopagite. The subject is similar to that of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* in proposing a method towards union with God through the management of knowledge. Discernment between orders of knowledge and disciplining the contents of the mind are the methods employed. Yet this is not for public consumption. From the outset in the prologue, the techniques described are to be withheld from being read or written or spoken about by or to any but a "perfect follower of Christ."[4] What would such a perfect follower in this tradition be like? Perhaps quite different from a perfect follower as they might be conceived in another time or place. Whatever the nature of such a refined disciple might be, they are the heirs to an esoteric

[2] St John of the Cross, The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (New York: DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY INC., 1964), 219.
[3] Dionysius the Areopagite, The Cloud of Unknowing, ed Evelyn Underhill (London: Stuart and Watkins, 1970),
[4] Dionysius the Areopagite, The Cloud of Unknowing, 39.

body of knowledge and practice. This is in essence a spiritual technology for discernment in the complexity of living.

Today, in my experience, the interior search and work of faith is multidimensional, just as our outward work for justice in the world is in the multicultural arena. Thus, knowledge and discovery need to be interdisciplinary in order to describe various aspects of experience to diverse ears. Rather than closed esoteric practice, I engage an open exchange of possibilities. I grew up within a Western Christian environment, yet over the last dozen years, the practice of Yoga has become the lens through which the tradition of my upbringing makes sense and through which my work in the world seems possible.

The Landscape Along the Way

My upbringing in the church came from the progressive tradition. The United Church congregation to which my family belonged struggled to make traditional elements of scripture relevant to contemporary living. Language was modified to reflect twentieth century sensibilities of equality, and the theological vision that prevailed from our internal struggles was one in which social justice in the world grew out of our choice to be open and accepting. Political life in this model extended naturally from religious life. Needless to say, this was often the terrain of conflict amongst ourselves and sometimes in the domain beyond the church walls where the work for justice would call us to action.

The type of scrutiny and discernment we brought to bear on the scriptural tradition was not just about the way things were described. It was not only about the inclusivity of language and bringing ancient scripture into step with contemporary reality, but also

about the structure of our faith. We wrestled with the deeper meaning of being called to follow in the way of the Christ. Choices between infrastructure for the immediate church community versus social action in the broader community as priorities for resource allocation spoke to how we situated our faith in the wider world. Sometimes the equality we sought amongst ourselves led to the discovery of very tender spots in personal egos and attachments to age old ideas and practices of the group. For some, there was attachment to the old words of the hymns. For others, talking about nuclear arms in the Christmas Eve service was challenging to the hopes of some to simply have a merry Christmas. Several times, it seemed the bubble we were expanding grew to a critical point and imploded. When that happened, we began again.

I have always had a strong spiritual connection to nature. As I was growing up, the garden in the backyard opened into a world of deserts and mountains and oceanic experiences, hiking and camping, and building a cottage in the forest. The gardens that my parents and grandparents tended were very much microcosms that blossomed into the immense complexity and vastness of the night sky. We would wonder over the stars lying on our backs by the lake, far away from the lights of cities and their congestion and confusion. Being part of the continuum between the miraculously small and the unutterably immense order of nature has always been where I situated my experience of spirit. Lying on my belly amongst the sweet peas, I was an explorer of the jungle, looking through the tangled canopy of the backyard garden. Lying on my back in the night I was like a fish, suspended, wide-eyed, at the bottom of a cosmic ocean of stars.

In between the imperatives of the social world and the ringing silence of the forest, I have had a lifelong fascination with philosophy and theology. In the days when I was

younger, I do not think I was even aware of the process taking place, but there has always been an imperative to know and understand the experiences of the liminal and the ineffable. I spent years on an undergraduate degree studying philosophy without ever really realizing that it was really not just the *ideas* of the mysteries of being which interested me, but the *experience* of what those ideas represented.

Though I was active through my teenaged years in the church youth group, like many young people, as an adult I left home and simultaneously left the church. It was not a conscious decision so much as a natural growth outward. It was an internal necessity to break away and establish my identity and my life in the world as an autonomous agent. It was perhaps just coincidence that, while I moved away to go to university, my home congregation was shifting ministerial staff and amalgamating with another sibling congregation next door. It may be just coincidence, yet being a part of something larger engendered a connection that made me feel like changes in the whole were mirrored in the part, or perhaps that what I felt and did had echoes beyond my personal sphere. Maybe this is a compositional fallacy, or a superstitious inflation, but what I believed it meant was that I still felt somehow connected at the very locus of disconnection.

Today, I look back and recognize that, whether I knew it or not, I was divided in myself as I embarked on my adult studies. What has occurred to me is that this division may be understood as one between my somatic sense and my intellectual sense. Growing up in my family was about growing gardens, living in the forest, journeying to the mountains, and plumbing mysterious depths for sparkling fish. In fact, fishing has remained one of the most powerful spiritual activities that I continue to experience. Suspended on the surface, dividing one domain from another, I cast my hopes beyond my

vision and let them sink. Silence is the practice. Sometimes something takes hold of this extension of me and is drawn in. It defies expectation as a practice; sometimes nothing happens at all. If I would not encounter death, then I have to let my findings go. My parents loved and lived in nature and encouraged us as children to express artistically the wonder and sometimes awful beauty of being in the world. My process as a young adult became increasingly towards thinking about the nature of living in nature rather than feeling the experience in itself.

I started off with the idea that I was going to be a biologist and ended up with a philosophy degree. To this day, I am seduced by the desire to try to navigate mystery with intellect. I am drawn to the idea that, in the microcosmic representation of the mind, I might build or discover some model of our deeper nature, our relationship to the vastness, some structure to our paradoxical sense of being selves and being connected. It is fun to try, but it is ultimately mistaken to become identified with such machinations as being any more than representations. Reason may be understood as a quality of spiritual life, but it is far from being the whole truth.

By the time I was done my undergraduate work, I had an arsenal of ideas and was practiced at wielding them, but like many new graduates, I was lost. In the absence of a structure of goals and assignments, I was both free and rudderless. My back and my hands went to work in a myriad of camps, warehouses, and factories. I advocated justice and environmental issues in lunchrooms and bar rooms, and even door-to-door for a couple of different organizations. I made money and ruffled feathers, and these were the illusions of purpose and meaning under which I lived. It seemed like I was on a gerbil

wheel of arguments and five-day work cycles, passing time yet changing little but the transient details from day to day.

At some point, I discovered that I was unhappy, so I quit my job, packed a bag, and took a one-way flight to the first destination that went on a seat sale. Something I reflect on now is how, during my travels, I was justified in distraction. I did not need a program or itinerary; wherever I went and wherever I was filled the requirements of travel. Moving and seeing was an end in itself. If something made me uneasy, I just moved on. Six months later, I arrived back in Edmonton with a lot of stories to tell, but still, and even perhaps feeling more deeply, without purpose.

I went back to working with my body, this time roofing houses, and I threw myself at the work. I had a focus while I was there and was too exhausted to think when the day was done. I worked and watched and learned until I was proficient enough to go into business myself, which became the new distraction into which I thought I might pour my energies. I grew fit and strong and felt pride in my independence. I was free, so it seemed, yet somewhere in the back of my heart, there was a voice from my studies in philosophy that said, "Free for what?"[5] It was not enough to escape from the time clock routine of the industrial setting, or the endless rhetorical banter of the lunch room. My time was mine, but towards what was I directed? Was there anything beyond or greater than myself into which I sought to grow?

I happened upon the Church again as part of my family's Christmas routine of attending evening service. Usually, my experience of worship service would be somewhat disconnected with everything but the music. Typically, I would find myself

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra: On the way of the Creator" in The Portable Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 175.

critiquing the proceedings as though they were part of a theatrical production. My true connection to the Holy has always been something personal, something private. In this instance, however, I found myself drawn in to a web of interesting ideas. The sermon was both inspired and philosophically grounded in its footnotes. I came back home finding myself nourished in a way I had not even realized I missed. The ideas I had been packing around from my university days had a place in a spiritual context and were meaningful to more than just myself. I joined discussion groups and then the choir, and then found myself enrolling in a program of theological studies.

My earliest connection with Christian life was rooted in working for social justice, and so it was on this terrain that I began the practical aspects of my program. Working within a downtown church community, I gathered a group of volunteers to support an inner-city agency that provided lunch to homeless people. It was like filling a sieve with water. It became clear to me that getting together to construct sandwiches once a month was not enough, or at least, it did not feel like enough. It had a sense of safety in the church kitchen, yet I sensed somehow that what was required was beyond material generosity. What was required was personal engagement with the very individuals in the community these sandwiches were meant for, yet for some it seemed that this felt hard and scary. Very few folks, when asked, were interested in stepping out of their comfort zone of the church kitchen to interact with the people they hoped to serve.

I learned of a job opportunity with a different inner-city agency and decided to take the plunge and apply. I have been quite a few places in the world as a solo traveller, places where people live in ways difficult to imagine from my protected middle-class Western

Canadian perspective. Yet, when you are a traveler, you can always just move along when encountering something uncomfortable, let alone truly awful.

I got the job I had applied for, but what I encountered was just about the most formidable experience of culture shock I had ever known, even though the work took place in my own backyard. I was frightened right from the start. I not only felt like a foreigner but like I had a target painted on my back. In fact, the very first day I walked through the doors, someone told me in no uncertain terms that I had a nice coat, and they were going to steal it. Inside the centre was neutral ground for gangs and their activities, but outside there was a protocol of posturing and intimidation, which was from a completely different realm than anything I had formerly experienced. I was afraid, yet one afternoon, after a group of youths with matching color-coordinated clothes got right up close to stare me down through the car window at the intersection outside of work, I received a bizarrely timed phone call that I had won a set of complimentary martial arts classes.

I decided to try out the martial arts lessons. It was new territory for me. I was afraid, but I went anyway. Developing and refining strength and skill were the superficial rewards of this practice. For the first couple of years, this was how I treated my training. Something else occurred, however, over these years of rehearsed behaviour: I found I became increasingly accustomed to the circumstance of conflict and danger. On a deeper level than movement of arms and legs, I discovered a path on a continuum to calm in the theatre of struggle. Dealing with adversaries meant fight or flight. In martial arts, we generally practiced staying and dealing with adversaries, discomfort, and especially fear.

I remember the master instructor saying to me one day, “You could become good at this, but your greatest obstacle is your breathing.”

I was, ironically, largely impeded by stiffness from years of distance running and cigarette smoking since my mid-teens. One Christmas, my sister gave me a gift certificate for a local Yoga studio. I do not recall what I thought about going into my first class. Perhaps I thought I would be able to kick higher or effect more sophisticated submission holds if I had greater range of motion. The first experience I encountered in starting the Yoga class was, of course, fear of unknown territory. I had no idea what I was doing, and as I recall, I was seemingly a visible minority of sorts as the only male participant in the class. I made it through. It was hard but I went back, maybe out of pride or not wanting to waste the gift—I cannot recall which. What I do recall is that over the course of the ten classes on my gift card, something extraordinary began to happen.

I had no idea how much discomfort I had been experiencing until I sat with it, worked through it, and began to feel it ebb and drift away. It was like I had been walking around in a suit of armour for the better part of twenty years without realizing it, yet as I practiced even at the most preliminary stage, I felt like this living encumbrance was falling away piece by piece. I had no idea how imprisoned I had been until I began to experience freedom. This new release was initially experienced only with respect to my physical body. It was not even on my radar that *asana*, the postures most people understand as being Yoga, is really only one dimension of eight in developing a full practice of yoga.

I cannot describe in any exhaustive sense the depth and breadth of this tradition any more than I could describe those of Christianity, completely short of a summa in theology. What I can describe is my interaction with a particular Christian experience and with a particular experience of Yoga practice. I engage both practices on a personal level, and though both are perhaps embedded in a body of tradition and history, they are not experienced exhaustively but partially at any given present moment. In short, despite any and all other doctrines and assertions regarding the various dimensions of human existence that the Christian message speaks to, being grounded in God in heart and mind and work in the world is where the message of Christ lands for me. In counter point, boiling it down to one succinct, yet non-exhaustive passage from the yoga sutras: the practice of Yoga consists of discipline, self-study, and devotion to God. (sutra 2:1)[6]

I have grown into a sense of Christian identity where new being is what life in Christ is oriented towards. This points to transformation of how we see and understand and behave by grounding ourselves in the greater identity which underlies the Holy. The practice of Yoga is designed to discipline body and mind in order for us to be able to discern the changeable in our human nature from the constant and eternal, which is the essence of our being and experiencing. (sutras 1:1-!:3)[7]

Both traditions have extensive technical discussions as to how this is to take place, and as a result, many schools and denominations; yet, in essence, I experienced a harmonic resonance between the two. These two ways enriched and informed each other in my spiritual life, even in their respective points of dissonance. I have had the disquieting

[6] Ravi Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patangali's Yoga Sutras: A New Translation and Guide (Sandpoint, ID: Morning Light Press, 2009), 57.
[7]Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patangali's Yoga Sutras, 3-8.

occasion to witness the commodification and distortion of both these paths, and it has only challenged me to be vigilant in discernment and committed to the spirit of compassion which marks one of the many points of convergence of these ways of living reverence for the Holy.

The winding path I have taken has nevertheless brought me on a return course. In every instance, no matter how far I travel from my origins and no matter what challenges I face, I find the same necessity to bring my findings and experiences into the fold—to bring them back home, so to speak. I understand the experience of new cultural phenomena with reference to the familiar culture of my upbringing. This is not a matter of assessment from a distance but of inhabiting experience in the most intimate sense. My origins are changed as they encounter differences in the world. Standing on the edge testing the water with my toe will not suffice. I have had to dive in, and there is no way to do this without coming out wet with change. Wherever I go, I encounter the same mystery that tugs at the edges of my heart and mind; intuitions of the Holy. It is like a sense every now and then of seeing through more than just my own eyes. Sometimes my interests and goals fall away and I feel oriented in a way that stands still while life is just passing through, like water through a standing wave in the river. This situation pervades my experience. It is always underneath whatever else may be there. It is ever present. Only my awareness of it slips in and out of resolution. How does the experience of practicing presence relate to the Holy?

Threads in the Tapestry of Yoga

Just as there is a long history and many contributors to Christianity's emergence and diversification, it is important to recognize the same of Yoga and its place in the broader context of Indian philosophy. Yoga is considered one of the six pillars of Indian philosophy. These six pillars all share an acceptance of the Vedas, a large body of liturgical materials, poems, and stories composed somewhere between 1500 and 1000 BCE.

Of particular importance to this project are three of these pillars: Yoga and the Yoga sutras of Patanjali; Samkhya philosophy as described in the Samkhya karika of Ishvara Krsna; Vedanta (meaning after the Vedas) or otherwise called the Upanishads. There is fundamental accord between these three branches of the broader tradition, but still there are some points of departure just as there are points of theological dispute among different schools of thought in the broader Christian tradition.

The different pillars employ differing terminologies for similar concepts, and this can lead to confusion. In the Upanishads, *Atman* is the term for describing the soul. This is the seat of that which is of the eternal and yet resides in each transient being. *Atman* is individual, but it is identical with the source, which is *Brahman*. *Brahman* means literally the vastness. Just as in early Christian gnostic literature, such as the Gospel of Thomas, where there is a seed or spark of the divine in each individual, in the Upanishads there is the *atman*, which resides in the deepest part of each individual. Consider the passage from saying three of the Gospel of Thomas:

> But the Kingdom is inside you and it is outside you.
> When you know yourselves, then you will be known,
> And you will understand that you are children of the living father
> But if you do not know yourselves,

Then you will dwell in poverty and you are poverty.[8]

The fall from grace, or exile from God in gnostic terms, is of a psychological character rather than being physical or spatially represented as it is in the Genesis accounts of the first couple in their garden paradise. In the Yoga tradition, as with the teachings of Samkhya philosophy, the psychological nature of exile is also the case. In Samkhya, however, there is no attempt to explain origins of this circumstance, but rather only how to overcome it.[9] One fundamental distinction is that while the Yoga Sutras admit and encourage the existence and impact of God, Samkhya is essentially atheistic.

Yoga Sutras

The Yoga Sutras are a series of concise statements describing the philosophical insights and practices of Yoga. They were compiled by Patanjali somewhere between the third century before and the third century after the common era. Though the Yoga tradition is quite ancient, these sutras, or threads, are the earliest systematic descriptions of Yoga. The form is quite abbreviated for purposes of mnemonic ease and is intended to be discussed, expanded, and explored by the student. Many of the contributions of other branches of Indian philosophy are assumed as background, and though not appearing explicitly in the sutras, they nevertheless appear in the earliest commentator's discussions.

1:1 Here and now is the practice of Yoga.
1:2 Yoga is for establishing the mind in stillness.
1:3 Then the Seer Dwells in its essential nature.
1:4 Otherwise, the movements of the mind are regarded as the Seer. [10]

[8] Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer ed., The Gnostic Bible: gnostic Texts of Mystical Wisdom from the Ancient and Medieval Worlds (Boston: New Seeds Books, 2006), 45.
[9] Mircea Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and freedom (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 17.
[10] Ravi Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 3-8.

The *Seer* is the term used in the sutras to describe the element of pure consciousness present in the experience of being. This is in contrast with *the seen*, which represents nature in all its forms and permutations. What is essential is to recognize that the contents or movements (*vrittis)* of the heart/mind (*chitta*) are not identical with the conscious subject. The *Seer* must not be mistaken for the *Seen.* This same distinction between the *Seer* and the *Seen* may also be found in the Bhagavad Gita, an important poem from the Epic Mahabharata. Here, however, the *Seer* and the *Seen* are described as the *Knower of the Field* and the *Field*, respectively.

Underlying these cryptic sutras is an assumption of the tenets of Samkhya Philosophy. In Samkhya, however, the terminology is somewhat different. All of nature including mind and thought contents are products of *Prakriti. Prakriti* represents the *Seen*. The *Seen* is the manifest, that which is productive and that which is produced. Though nature is eternal in this system of metaphysics, its products are all transient. Pure consciousness, on the other hand, is both eternal and unchanging. This is called *Purusha*. *Purusha* is without attributes. It is neither productive or produced. [11] *Purusha* in Samkhya is what Patanjali refers to as the *Seer*.

Purusha and *Prakriti* are co-eternal. They are distinct in their difference yet need each other. *Prakriti* is for *Purusha* that *Purusha* may know experience through contents and attributes of *Prakriti.* This is the source of pleasure and simultaneously pain. The suffering engendered by experience of nature is due to ignorance of the distinction

[11] Swami Virupakshananda trans., Samkhya Karika of Ishvara Krsna with The Tattva Kaumudi of Sri Vacaspati Misra (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press,1995), VII.

between *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, the *Seer* and the *Seen*. This soteriological situation of ignorance leads us to seek liberation.[12]

The Sutras describe certain hinderances which must be overcome in order for liberating discernment to take place. These are called *kleshas* and there are five. Chief among *kleshas* is

avidya or ignorance and all the other hinderances come from this central obstacle.

2:5 *Avidya* is the cause of all the others, whether dormant, attenuated, intermittent, or fully active.
2*:6 Avidya* is seeing the transient as eternal, the impure as pure, dissatisfaction as pleasure, the non- Self as Self.[13]

The second hinderance is the sense of separate self or *asmita*. This is described as the misidentification, through *avidya*, of the power of seeing with what is seen. This is the operative obstacle described earlier in sutra 1:4. The separate, isolated ego that identifies itself as its attributes, cuts itself off from the vastness of being (*Brahman*) or as Christ words in the Gospel of John describe, "I AM" which is Yahweh in Hebrew.[14]

The third hinderance or klesha is *raga*. *Raga* is the attraction to pleasure. The fourth hinderance is dvesha, or the aversion to suffering. Despite their apparent contrast, it is observed that we dwell on both and perhaps even more so on suffering. Traumas make deep impressions on individuals and social groups, which may often eclipse the memories or longings for pleasure. Both are nevertheless powerful obstacles to overcome.

The fifth hinderance is called *abhinivesha,* and this is the longing for continuance of the status quo. This may be described in terms of resistance to change or, in more

[12] Swami Virupakshananda trans., Samkhya Karika, 64.

[13] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 60.
[14] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 62.

poignant and ultimate terms, the fear of death. The great unknown is perceived as a threat to our continuity, which is only understood in explicit terms relating to what little we know and experience. Ravindra likens *abhinivesha* to Newton's first law of inertia where things in motion or rest stay in that condition unless acted upon by some outside force.[15]

Situation in the discussion

The relationship between Western culture and Yoga is a relatively new one. It has only been since the 1960s that Yoga began gaining traction as a popular and growing practice in North America. In the United States, for example, participation has grown from 3% of the population in 1976 to 15% of the population by 2016.[16] This growth in popularity has brought with it discussion, contention, and controversy in a variety of arenas. For my purposes here, it is important to address some of these points of debate and, at least in general terms, to situate my personal practice within the broader landscape at the intersection of Yoga practice and Christian identity.

Is Yoga Religious? This is the title of an article by John Shevland[17] that discusses different perceptions of what Yoga is and how it has been portrayed by different interests. For many Westerners, Yoga is synonymous with the physical postures of *asana*. In fact, if one goes to the average yoga class or attends organized practice, this is what one finds, so many folks would never suspect there was anything more to it. This limited conception of yoga was one of two major points of contention raised by the Hindu

[15] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 63.
[16] Candy Gunther Brown, "Christian Yoga: Something New Under the Sun/Son" Church History Vol. 87, issue 3. (Sept. 2018): 659-683, http://doi.org// 10.1017/S0009640718001555.
[17] John N., Shevland, "Is Yoga Religious?" Christian Century Vol. 128, Issue 12 (6/14/2011):22-25, http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?/vid=18&sid=8fe8...mgr4006&bdata=JnNpdGu97Whvc3QtbG12ZQ%3d%3d#AN=61219470&db=a9h

American Federation (HAF) in a statement issued in 2010. The second point raised was an assertion that Yoga is inseparable from Hinduism and that attempts to separate these appropriates Yoga for financial benefit. These objections rose from a campaign called *Take Back Yoga* that was meant to address prejudice and the caricature of Hinduism against a backdrop of colonialism and secular trends in Indian politics.

Responses to the HAF were varied. New age author Deepak Chopra weighed in with the assertion that Yoga has pre-Hindu roots and observed that Yoga is more about consciousness and spirituality than cultic practice. The roots of Yoga lie in *Sanatana Dharma*, a philosophical system which predates classical Hinduism historically.[18] In contrast to this view, Aseem Shukla (HAF founder) conflates *Sanatana Dharma* with Hinduism. Shevland points out that this conflation of *Sanatana Dharma* with Hinduism may be very possible in spiritual life, but that it is inconsistent historically.

Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological seminary in Louisville, presented a position that echoed the HAF view of linking Yoga and Hinduism inextricably, only Mohler framed this as a categorical condemnation of Yoga and eastern meditation in general.[19] Despite a functional unfamiliarity with Yoga, Mohler described a false dilemma between religious identity and practice wherein one may be either Christian or Hindu with nothing in between. In this view, one has either a biblical-based religious identity or one that is meditational based. There is no room for dialogue.

Yet it is precisely dialogues of religious experience that the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Roman Catholic Church have advocated. It is here where the author Shevland lands in all this, drawing attention to the notion of eucharistic responsibilities. At the

[18] Shevland, "Is Yoga Religious?," 2.
[19] John N., Shevland, "Is Yoga Religious?," 3.

Lord's table we are called to the reconciliation of all members of the body of Christ; this describes the sacramental sense of communion. The holistic ethic of Yoga, where mind and body and action in the world are harmonized, offers a vocabulary that might be valuable in exploring and expanding the link between Christian worship and work in the world. This has sweeping potential for the articulation of social ethics, public policy, and the life of action in general.[20]

Despite the questionable nature of the HAF's assertion that Yoga is necessarily linked to Hinduism if it is to be authentic, there is a real phenomenon of trying to translate Yoga practice into very different cultural language. Wheaton College, for example, promotes Yoga as a holistic practice serving physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, yet only in a "redeemed" form. Yoga must be redeemed from its non-Christian roots (being undeniably rooted in Hinduism), and this is accomplished by having instructors who sign a declaration of faith and by removing any Hindu cultural reference in traditional terminology, replacing it with Christian variants in English rather than Sanskrit.[21] It is not difficult to imagine how this might be seen as cultural appropriation.

On the one hand, there is a recognition that Yoga may be valuable in helping Christians be still in God's presence, as the Wheaton college put it, while on the other, there seems to be genuine fear of foreign cultural incursion hidden within the trojan horse of appropriating traditional Yoga forms, whether for spiritual and secular purposes. Ethnographer Marie Griffith points to a valorization among white middle-class American

[20] John N., Shevland, "Is Yoga Religious?," 4.

[21] Candy Gunther Brown, "Christian Yoga: Something New Under the Sun/Son" Church History Vol. 87, issue 3. (Sept. 2018) 659-683, http://doi10.1017/S0009640718001555

protestants of health and beauty as spiritual virtues in themselves.[22] We find Christian music, Christian aerobics, and so now Christian Yoga as well. These forms invite experiential, physically engaged and emotional encounters with God, yet in the case of Yoga, there may be, as Candy Gunther Brown puts it, somewhat of a theological stretch. Can we simply use Christianity as a belief-centred container into which we pour different contents without fear of imperialism or charges of appropriation? Brown seems to suggest that it may be culturally myopic to think that practice does not change belief.[23]

It is a common belief in different Yoga traditions that asana on its' own has psycho-spiritual effects. That is to say that we are changed more profoundly than on merely a physical dimension from practicing postures, whether we recognize it or not. Practicing postures leads one on a path of self-realization, which is aimed as a way of coming to know God. If one is coming from a particular perspective theologically, as the HAF is from a Hindu perspective, then the mere movement of the body in meditative sequence may enhance the practitioner's experience of their deeper tradition. In traditional Yoga philosophy, the deepest part of each individual is a spark of the divine, which poses no problems to metaphysical foundations in Hinduism, but when this is transposed into the experience of a belief-centered Christian faith, there is the potential for misunderstanding.[24]

Andrea Jain[25] describes the polarized views of Yoga in terms of a Christian Yoga-phobic position on one extreme over and against the Hindu origins proponents on the

[22] Brown, "Christian Yoga: Something New Under the Sun/Son," 659-683.
[23] Brown, "Christian Yoga: Something New Under the Sun/Son," 659-683.
[24] Brown, "Christian Yoga: Something New Under the Sun/Son," 659-683.
[25] Andrea R. Jain, "Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong? On Hindu Origins and Yogaphobia" Journal of the American Academy of Religion Vol 82, issue 2. (June 2014) 427-471, accessed Sept 11 2020, https://doi 10.1093/jaarel/lft099

other. While one position rejects Yoga out of hand, the other accepts only a very specific notion of what Yoga is. Oddly, both of these extremes appeal to a definition of Yoga as a static, homogenous, Hindu

system. Jain Holds that such assumptions essentialize what is Eastern as meaning Hindu.[26]

Rather, Yoga is a plural tradition beyond the scope of rigid definitional boundaries. The semantic field of meaning for Yoga is so broad, and the concept so malleable that, as Gordon White [27]put it, Yoga may be able to morph into any process or practice one chooses.

The polarized views of Yoga which rely on the assumption of fixed homogeneity end up perpetuating divisive representations of Yoga that are simply unrealistic. Jain suggests these views say more about the respective positions' subjectivities than they do about Yoga and that, in the case of Yoga-phobic responses, they rely on orientalist stereotypes that reinforce a notion of otherness despite any shared cultural qualities.[28]

Fear of extremes appears to be what one finds in a variety of Christian camps with respect to Yoga. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith describes the psycho-physical symbolism of Yoga postures as an obstacle to the experience of God warning that it may become an idol. They even go so far as to attribute schizophrenia, psychic disturbance, and moral deviations to what they refer to as a cult of the body. [29]

In fact, Yoga is far from a homogenous and static body of practices. While some schools focus on physical practice, this is generally thought to be one dimension of

[26]Jain, "Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong?," 427-471.
[27]Jain, "Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong?," 427-471.
[28]Jain, "Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong?," 427-471
[29]Jain, "Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong?," 436.

practice only. Vivekananda developed a revisionist historical narrative in which the focus on purely physical practice is discredited. Vivekananda contrasts what he came to call *Raga* Yoga, which is philosophical and meditative with Hatha yoga, which focuses on physical techniques. Yoga as a spiritual pursuit is here distinguished from Yoga as a physical practice. Nevertheless, both Vivekananda and the Hindu American Foundation seem to meet in the view that *Raga* Yoga, or what is described as eight-limbed Yoga in Patanjali's yoga sutras, is the authentic Yoga in contrast to purely postural Yoga, which has seen so much popularization.[30]

It appears that differences between those who protest against the popularization of Yoga, both coming from Christian camps of various denominations and Hindu representatives, have converged on some common ground. Unfortunately, that common ground seems to be judging a complex of practices and traditions that Yoga embodies as being identical with a fraction of its parts. The existence of difference and variety within the greater fold of tradition is no more emblematic of corruption if it is in the Yoga tradition than it would be if one considers the exotic differences in the Christian tradition. Those who protest against the popularization of Yoga should not fail to recognize that choice is a fact of contemporary culture and that this may serve to stretch boundaries of static religious practice that they would rather see maintained.

Charting a Course

The methodology I have employed in this research is mixed, yet it is essentially that of heuristic inquiry. As an outline, I have employed Clark Moustakas' model. The application of that model has been through the lens of practicing Yoga. There are six

[30]Jain, "Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong?," 427-471.

phases to Moustakas' method. First is the initial engagement, a period of inner search and self-dialogue, from which intuitive processes lead and ultimately distill what is personally compelling about the project into a question. The second phase is to immerse oneself in the question, living it and breathing it in every living context available. The third phase is to allow the gathered experience of living the question to incubate. This is a period of withdrawal from the question, allowing it to grow and form connections on its own. The fourth phase of illumination is like incubation in its passive nature, but where the processes of that growth come to light, and emerge into new understandings. The fifth phase is one of explication. Here, new insights that have emerged from the previous stages are examined and elucidated. The sixth phase is a creative synthesis of all the data and experiences of the previous phases of the method.[31]

The aim of Moustakas' heuristic model is to discover and potentially transform tacit knowledge that is mistaken and hinders us.[32] The same is true of Yoga. Passing beneath the surface contents of explicit knowledge to establish awareness in authenticity is a requirement for transformation. Yoga, however, is not just for transformation towards health and psychological wellness. The goal is preparation to be receptive to ultimate orders of experience, the Holy.

The six phases of Moustakas' heuristics have formed the outline of planned steps, but the content has been the lived practice of cultivating presence. Yoga practice is not just on a mat in a room at specific times any more than a Christian faith is encapsulated in the attendance of a worship service. The practice of presence off the mat takes this

[31] Clark Moustakas, Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1990), 27-31.
[32] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 29-30.

discipline out into the world of work and study and relationships, and permeates living one's faith. Journaling the challenges and discoveries of this process is the means through which self-examination has been documented and digested.

Svadyaya (self-study) is a pivotal dimension of Yoga, but this Sanskrit term is also translated as study of scriptures. Coming from a tradition of peoples of the book and having a keen interest in theological study are both part of what I have had to come to terms with. Looking carefully at how I understand scripture and how this situates me in the broader context of the Christian mosaic is a practice of discerning difference and distinction within my tradition as well as tensions within myself and between traditions. Where I find myself with respect to the great discussions of faith is part of discerning what is essential and authentic and present. Ideas can ground us as easily as they may distract or mislead us. This is what I have wrestled with. Continued study of theology and Yoga philosophy have nevertheless been an anchor in the journaling process through the active phases of Moustakas' method.

The practice of Yoga is a multi-dimensional heuristic method. It is both part of the subject and method engaged in this project. The eight limbs or dimensions of Yoga are divided into external limbs and internal limbs. They are listed in Sutra 2:29. External limbs are: *yama* or self-restraint; *nyama* or right social observance; *asana*, right posture or alignment; *pranayama*, regulation of breath; *pratyahara* or withdrawal of the senses. Internal limbs are *dharana* or concentration, *dhyana* or meditation, and *samadhi* or free attention.[33] These different dimensions of Yoga address all aspects of our psychosomatic being. They are methods of refinement and preparation that have value in themselves,

[33] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali"s Yoga Sutras, 83

but are designed to orient us towards God through ourselves. The discernment required is cultivating a knowledge of the difference between what we think and feel and the very essence of consciousness. We are no more the contents of our minds than the radio is the song that happens to be playing.

Understanding the nature of Yoga as a heuristic practice makes it particularly resonant with some Western academic models for self-study. There are many common points between Clark Moustakas' heuristic research model and methods of Yoga practice. Similar to Yoga philosophy, Moustakas emphasizes that the data to be discovered is within the student, and that this process transforms and awakens the student when pursued properly. [34] Like a Yoga practice, a heuristic inquiry is rigorous. It requires a passionate drive toward the question. This is analogous to *tapas* in yogic philosophy, which may be translated as vigor or heat, or energetic motivation.

Moustakas describes certain techniques for self-discovery. An inverted perspective is where one becomes imaginatively the subject of study. In a heuristic inquiry, it is not so much that one would have to imagine being oneself but resolve on some quality of being. Moving and shifting perspective from being as whole to being a part, or from general experience to the particular and back again, is part of what is referred to as self-dialogue.[35] This is analogous to observing the movements of the mind and distinguishing them from the subject itself in preliminary Yoga practice. This latitude in perspective, which is gained through self -dialogue, is employed to begin to distinguish explicit contents of awareness from tacit organizing structures that may function beneath our

[34] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 13.
[35] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 16.

awareness. [36] For example, as I begin in seated meditation to resolve my attention on my breath, distractions pop up. I might feel uneasy and immediately think of why that might be. An explanation becomes a story that becomes a daydream that stimulates a whole new chain of emotional reactions. When I come back to my breath with awareness, I see the story as fiction, which was inspired by my explanation of my feeling of uneasiness. I may ask how the story represented my explanation of my feeling and what that told me about my interpretive process. Every time I come back to the presence of my breath, it serves as a point of punctuation in the dialogue with self.

Ethical Considerations.

This thesis has not formally included any research participants apart from myself. Community is, however, an integral part of my experience of almost everything. Where reflections and journal work refer to specific individuals or true historical circumstance, an individual's privacy and organizational confidentiality must be protected. My journal reflections had to be unredacted to be authentic, but any representation of individuals was modified in an externally presented draft to shield them with anonymity. The creative synthesis component of Moustakas' heuristic methodology quite unexpectedly emerged as an exposition of non-fiction. Where I had envisioned the crafting of some representative creative piece, I discovered in real lived events a microcosm of this project that served better than fiction. In this chapter, names, genders, and relationships to myself were omitted and at times obscured creatively to respect the privacy of persons.

[36] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 21.

As part of the initial engagement with this project, I attempted to create a program of discipline. A daily *asana* practice, *pranayama,* and sitting meditation were one component. Daily study time for work with theological texts was another component. Prayer and daily journaling that reflected on my experience of Yoga and study formed another spoke in the wheel I envisioned. As well, there also had to be time to work on crafting this document and bringing it together.

It can be overwhelming simply trying to follow such a schedule in between full-time work shifts. My experiments in attempting to actualize this regimen revealed that the most pressing ethical consideration in this project was to protect myself from unrealistic expectations. At times, I encountered anxiety and lost sleep over not having enough time in the day. I recognized this perception from the start as unhealthy and counterproductive. I learned that persistence in discipline must be balanced with flexibility and self-care if the project is to be possible at all. Sometimes I needed to take a day off, or just go lightly. The important part was to persist within the qualities of steadiness and balance.

Ideas and conceptions of the Holy have taken many forms throughout history and across different disciplines. The body of work on this is vast, yet some thinkers stand out, and these will be examined with an eye for correlations and divergences. The method of this study explored a program of self-study in the Yoga tradition, within the frame work of Moustakas' heuristic research method. Autoethnography forms an illustration of experiences in the creative synthesis stage of this work, followed by an exposition of emerging meanings and an analysis of correlations to the question.

Chapter Two: Footprints: Signs of Others Passing

The Holy

The term Holy has been inhabited by many different ideas over time. The Holy of Holies was the description for the temple of tabernacle in the Hebrew scriptures, yet it was also the word used to designate God in those same scriptures. In the New Testament, Holy is used to describe Jesus.[37] The Holy Spirit describes the mysterious power or presence of God. This may be in nature or with people as a source of inspiration or power. In this sense, the Holy is something experienced.

The term Holy may be considered something, or it may designate a quality of something. When it is not meant to identify God, then it traditionally is used to associate certain qualities with God. Justice, purity, morality may be associated with Holiness. Holiness is often associated with order or perfection. In short, The Holy may be represented by any number of qualities or their ultimate source. The expansive variety of ways to describe this leads to the notion that the Holy cannot be described directly but only symbolically. Yet even here philosophers and theologians, whether by metaphor or rational construction, have employed any and all means to describe the source and meaning of the Holy. Some have even come to position that the Holy is so entirely beyond us that it represents the beyond or other itself in some definitive way.

In Rudolf Bultmann's view, God cannot be an entity of which direct knowledge is possible. There is no possibility of knowing God intellectually or experiencing God through spiritual states. In fact, he rejects mysticism along with any rational attempt to

[37] Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, 3rd. ed.

grasp the divine via negative, or in terms of what God is not. As such, we may play no part in revelation. We cannot prepare in any way to meet with God.[38]

This stems from the belief that the idea of God evaporates with any attempt at articulation. To rationalize or create a general conception of nature or law with respect to God is to stand outside of, or in Bultmann's terms, to objectify God by subjection to the realm of everything human. This would be far from definitively or wholly other. [39]

This seems, on the surface, to make experience of the Holy impossible, yet Bultmann's concept of faith serves as a bridge of sorts. Every decision in life involves a renewal of the decision of faith.[40] Revelation is realized only in the concrete events of life here and now, but I cannot find God in these events or through introspection, as communion with the Holy is outside my grasp. We can only be met by God's action.[41]

On the one hand, we can do nothing in this vision to approach or describe the Holy, yet on the other hand, Bultmann sees human life as moved by the search for God because it is always, either consciously or unconsciously, moved by the question of its' own existence. In essence, the question of God and the question of myself are identical.[42] This question is posed potentially at every present moment as every moment is pregnant with the crisis of faith. In every instant, there is the choice to live in purely mechanical terms or to live with reference to the greater mystery of our being as individuals and as unity in connection. We may simply see the stars, or we may open the portal of our

[38]Rudolf Bultmann, Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era: The making of Modern Theology 2. Ed. Roger Johnson
(London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1987), 74-78.
[39] Bultmann, Interpreting Faith, 86.
[40] Bultmann, Interpreting Faith, 199.
[41] Bultmann, Interpreting Faith, 313.
[42] Bultmann, Interpreting Faith, 310.

hearts to the vastness of which we partake. This choice, whether it is made while washing the dishes, or contemplating the cosmos, is the same insofar as it is the critical intersection of how we live and experience determined by the nature of our directed consciousness.

Reflecting on the Bhagavad Gita and the tradition from which it emerged, Ravi Ravindra echoes something of Bultmann's position. In this view, even the noblest of aspirations for the Holy must be given up as they cast projections of the heart and mind, which may obscure the unexpected and unthinkable mystery.[43] Here, the Holy as truth cannot be evoked by any effort of devotion on our part; it is always a matter of grace from the other side or beyond. Spiritual practice may resist our lower natures, but such practice may not achieve the Holy in any way independent of that towards which it is offered. [44] Here, Ravindra quotes the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart: " If there were a God of whom I had any Idea, it would not be worth having as a God."[45]

This situation reflects the premise from the Yoga sutras that there is both an active and a passive part to spiritual experience. On the one hand, our very being poses a question that we seek to answer. Through higher *vairagya* (detachment), we are drawn toward higher consciousness, but ultimately, that is out of our hands and beyond our lower nature. This being said, from our lower nature we can, by effort of will and practiced determination, aim ourselves toward transformation with *abhyasa* (practice). Ravi Ravindra describes this situation in *The Spiritual Roots of Yoga.* There, he explains how

[43] Ravi Ravindra, The Bhagavad Gita: A Guide to Navigating the Battle of Life (Boulder: Shambala, 2017), 73.
[44] Ravi Ravindra, The Bhagavad Gita, 77.
[45] Ravi Ravindra, The Bhagavad Gita, 73.

if all things come from Spirit, then God's omnipresence lives in the depths of all persons and things. Our desired spiritual end requires both Yoga from below as well as grace from above.[46]

Friedrich Schleiermacher[47] places what he called the contemplation of the pious at the intersection of different dimensions of experience. Ordinary experience of finite limited beings resides in a context that is outside of this normal field of limited events and causality. For Schleiermacher's part, he describes this as immediate consciousness of all finite things in and through the infinite. Similarly, all temporal things are understood through immediate consciousness in and through the eternal. This intersection between axes is described in terms of the intersection of space-time with the transcendent for Schleiermacher. The mediating variable of the religious symbol is described in terms of its experience rather than as a detached idea or concept. For Schleiermacher, the immediate unity of intuition and feeling bridge the separation between the mundane world of the horizontal dimension and the vertical domain of the sacred upon which it ultimately and absolutely depends.[48]

This understanding of all finite things in and through the infinite represents a correlation to Sutra 1:23 where *samadhi*, or timeless insight, is depicted as being potential experience to one who surrenders oneself to God.[49] In fact, devotion to God may lead to the insight of *samadhi*. In the Yoga tradition, surrender to God is dedication to our

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[46] Ravi Ravindra, "Is the Everlasting Eternal?",in The Spiritual Roots of Yoga: Royal Path to Freedom. (Sandpoint, ID: Morning light Press, 2006), 40.
[47]Friedrich, Schleiermacher, "Religion as feeling and relationship: Second speech," in Friedrich Shleiermacher: Pioneer of modern Theology, ed. Keith W. Clements (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987), 83.
[48]Schleiermacher, Religion as Feeling and Relationship, 86.
[49]Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 27.

deepest Self, our reason for being, or in Paul Tillich's terminology, our ultimate concern.[50] Certainly, this might be expressed in one dimension as absolute dependence, where the self is surrendered unconditionally and completely as Schleiermacher describes. The difference in vision is one where, for Schleiermacher, the experience of feeling and intuition are internal experiences of the external relation to God. However, in the tradition from which Yoga has grown, God, or The Holy, is found in the depths of each person. This is the timeless insight.[51]

Rudolf Otto[52] suggested that the feeling of dependence as a pivotal experience of the Holy may be reduced to existential dependence and the causal relation between creator and created. This may very well remain simply an empirical assertion about the relationship, and as such, does not necessarily convey the quality of that relationship. Alternatively, Otto employs the term "creature feeling" to convey the qualitative experience of human status with respect to the majesty of God.

The quality of creature feeling is crucial in this view. Rational concepts such as existential dependence are synthetic attributes. Such rational concepts of God are predicated to a subject that they cannot comprehend.[53] The awe and dread that are kindled in the presence of what Otto calls *mysterium tremendum* are far from rationally derived. These feelings are in reference to what is non-natural or supernatural, uncanny in quality, and not just mundane feelings at a higher order of intensity.[54] These feelings are qualitatively different as they are projections from that which is wholly other.

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[50]Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 28-29.
[51]Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 30.
[52] Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 20.
[53] Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 2.
[54] Otto, The Idea of the Holy, 16.

Where is the wholly other? There is a simplistic tendency to think spatially and segregate the other physically, yet creature feeling is just that, a feeling that is experienced internally with respect to awe and dread. Its experience as internal does not demand that the source must be external to the individual. What is other or wholly other may be a mode of experience of what is most intimate and closest to hand. Just as nature is woven with Spirit in the symbolic terms of *Purusha* (Seer) and *Prakriti* (seen), or alternatively, the internal landscape might be described in Jungian terms as comprising ego and Self. Vedanta would maintain the oneness and sacredness of all reality. This finds expression in the words of Ramana Maharishi "There are no others."[55] Here, the concept of Rudolf Otto's wholly other cannot be real or true at the higher level but only from the perspective of the lower separate self. Or, perhaps the experience of *mysterium tremendum* reflects more the human desire to be distinct in relation to the vastness than it does our real relationship to it.

Probably the most important source from the Vedic literature with reference to Yoga is the Bhagavad Gita. In this poem, Krishna (the lord of Yoga and incarnation of deity) describes to his pupil and friend Arjuna the secrets of Yoga at a critical moment, poised between conflicting loyalties in the center of a battlefield on the brink of war. To relinquish the fruits of our actions is the way this is described in the Bhagavad Gita. Where our consciousness is centered on God, and our actions are not for some end envisioned in the material realm, we are guided by the timeless insight of faith. When we are no longer self-serving, or serving transient purposes or some passing agenda, we may

[55] Ravi Ravindra, "Uniqueness and Oneness in The Lion's Roar: Vedanta and the Sikh Yoga", in The Spiritual Roots of Yoga: Royal Path To Freedom. (Sandpoint, ID: Morning light Press, 2006), 115.

act as though each of our choices are sacrificial and offered in faith and submission to the divine. Spirit is not equal to events but events may be for Spirit.[56]

In the most mundane sense, the experience of the Holy requires presence. If one is not there in time and space, or not conscious of being there, it is immaterial what might be experienced if circumstances were different. It goes without saying that what would be experienced, were one present for the experience of the Holy, would have to be present as well. When Thich Nhat Hanh describes the presence that allows us to live each moment fully, he is describing the personal human conditions for recognizing that presence that meets us as miraculous in each moment of experience.[57]

This presence, which opens us to the nature of the miraculous, this energy of mindfulness, is compared by Hanh to the energy of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present in each of us, only with variable intensity and strength. Our practice of mindfulness is to increase and strengthen this presence with what tools we have at our disposal. That is, dwelling mindfully in each moment transforms that moment from a mechanical experience into its full potential as an instance of renewal.[58]

This renewal may be found in the Bhagavad Gita, and its call is to act in the world but free from ego-centered life and, rather, for a world-oriented and world-transforming life. This life draws strength from deep mystical experience of oneness with the divine. The experience of being loved by God liberates the human self from its' bondage to existential loneliness and doubts. Growth or self-realization in the wisdom Yoga tradition

[56] Ravi Ravindra, "Dimensions of the Self: Buddhi in the Bhagavad Gita'",in The Spiritual Roots of Yoga: Royal Path To Freedom. (Sandpoint, ID: Morning light Press, 2006).
[57] Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong, " Miracle of Mindfulness: Buddhist and Biblical Perspectives" Asian Journal of Theology Vol.29, Issue 1. (April 2015), 99-116.
[58] Mong, "Miracle of Mindfulness,"106.

consists in a progressive interiorization of our necessary outward forms of ritual, knowledge, and work in the world.[59]

Presence, then, may be understood in two senses as it relates to the Holy. There is the presence of the Holy in us, or to us, as well as the nature or quality of our presence to the Holy. Thomas Merton describes a wind that carries both visible and invisible seeds which, through the stream of time, are left as germs of spiritual vitality. These seeds come to rest imperceptibly in the human heart and will.[60] This describes the Holy side of presence, or that which comes to us or waits for us. Anthony de Mello, SJ [61] describes how awareness of one's breathing and body sensations leads to an interior silence. It is only in this silence, or through this silence, that God's revealed word may be heard or understood. This practice of mindful silence describes the side of presence that we actively engage in order to meet the potential of the Holy in any given moment.[62] It is significant that the first rule of St. Benedict is to listen.

The human person can only dispose the self to receive the light of Grace according to the Bhagavad Gita. It is the divine who confers the light of wisdom on human intellect and who moves the heart with the power of love. This love transforms all works in the world into a means of final integration. The self is the primary shrine of God, and the process of attaining harmony therein is a gift of divine grace. Through such Grace the entire universe is perceived as the body of God.[63]

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[59] Pavulraj Michael, "Jnana Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita – The Path for Self-Realization" Asian Journal of Theology Vol. 29, Issue 2. (Oct 2015) 195-226.
[60] Mong, "Miracle of Mindfulness," 99-116.
[61] Anthony de Mello, Praying Body and Soul, Adapted and Enlarged by Gabriel Galache, S,J., (New York: The Crossroads Pub;ishing Company, 1997), 14
[62]Michael, "Jnana Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita," 195-226.
[63] Michael, "Jnana Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita," 205-6.

Such perception of the universality of the Holy is described in terms of faith by Ingolf Dalferth[64] in his essay, *Radical Theology*. Here, the conceptual perception of God as that upon which everything rests and without which nothing is possible, is translated into the terms of a theology that must take everything into account. In other words, everything is seen in the light of God. What is described as radical theology rests on the entirely contingent eschatological event of becoming new. This becoming new means seeing through the eyes of faith. What is seen through this new vision is not simply different from what was before; rather, Dalferth insists it was previously not present. What is new is faith as a way of living and perceiving life as a whole. This mode of seeing through faith perceives all dimensions and phenomena in relation to God.[65]

This *Radical Theology* understands the universal reference to God through faith as neither arbitrary or necessary. When it occurs, it is meaningful, yet it is not required or inevitable. Faith forms a horizon of interpreting the phenomena of life. This event horizon describes the transformation of non-faith to faith through God's effective presence. Dalferth states that no one can move from unfaith to faith on their own accord or power. One simply cannot perceive beyond the threshold of the event horizon of faith. Unfaith is blind to faith, while faith is beyond the horizon of unfaith.[66] They are incomprehensible to each other.

The Holy has at times been described as something apart or other, yet when considering creation as the foundational expression of a creator, the whole cosmos may

[64] Ingolf U. Dalferth, Radical Theology: An Essay on Faith and Theology in the Twenty-First Century" (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), XII
[65] Dalferth, Radical Theology, XVII
[66] Dalferth, Radical Theology, 59.

take on the quality of the Holy. Stephen Chase[67] describes the whole universe as being a language. This language is more sophisticated and replete with words than any Holy scripture or text. The universe is all around us and permeates us. We may not notice it, but we are always enmeshed in creation, although we may only be reminded of this when our perceptions shift and our expectations are shattered. Chase encourages practices that begin with the awareness of intentions yet are free from goals as a means to becoming attuned with the ubiquity of the Holy through creation. Practices that slow us down and draw our focus into contemplative forms may open our eyes and ears to the Holy that resides in our very midst.[68]

The idea of radical transcendence, which has been attributed to God by so many theologians, does not rule out the positive fellowship and presence in the world that God's immanence in that world would also suggest. Somehow, the Holy may be seen as nearer to us than we are to ourselves. Chase describes this as posing a risk of loss to human experience. The loss of identity in intimacy may take on a very new intensity where that intimacy is with a creation inhabited pervasively by what has sometimes been described as radically other. There is a poignant vulnerability in recognizing our part in creation. If the creator were to withdraw their breath of spirit, all the material of flesh and life should perish in that instant.[69] Living is a delicate experience when realizing the circumstance of being suspended in creation sustained from moment to moment by mystery.

[67] Stephen Chase, Nature as Spiritual Practice (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011)
[68] Chase, Nature as Spiritual Practice, XVI
[69] Chase, Nature as Spiritual Practice, 10.

In the early Christian Church, the term *nipsis* in Greek was used to describe the attentiveness or watchfulness as a practice engaged by what were sometimes called *niptic* fathers and mothers. These were practitioners of desert spirituality who engaged what we might understand today as mindfulness to draw attention into wonder. One such practitioner, Hesychios the Priest, described what opens from attentiveness to creation thus: "…continuity of attention produces inner stability, inner stability produces natural intensification of watchfulness; and this intensification gradually and in due measure gives way to contemplative mystery and insight."[70] Chase points out that the pilgrimage into the desert in this tradition is really a pilgrimage to the self.[71]

The obstacle we encounter in the Christian contemplative mystical tradition is that we lack the purity of heart to experience the sacramental aspect of reality. We need both sacramental and ecological awareness to be fully alive, yet our normal awareness is opaque, self-centred, and dispersed.[72] A practice grounded in attentiveness to nature and our place in the vastness of creation serves to open an aperture in our awareness to the subtle sacramental dimension which is all around us. Such a practice may open a connection between the sacramental, symbolic sense of communion and the ontological sense of oneness or union.

Thomas Ryan[73] is a yoga practitioner and a Catholic priest. More than merely a practitioner, he teaches and writes on the subject of Yoga and faith. He describes how

[70] Hesychios the Priest, On Watchfulness and Holiness, in The Philokalia: The complete Text, trans. and ed. G.E.H. Palmer et al., vol. 1(New York: Faber and Faber, 1979), 163.
[71] Chase, Nature as Spiritual Practice, 23-24.
[72]Chase, Nature as Spiritual Practice, 36.
[73] Thomas Ryan, Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 17.

knowledge of God is ordinarily indirect, taking place through the mediating form of ideas, images, and concepts.

There is, however, the faculty to have experience of God beyond the distortions of imagery and human cognition. It is through something he calls the mystical heart that we might have a direct grasp of God. He suggests that this faculty is in all of us, but mostly lies dormant. If it is awakened and refined, cleared of obstructive thoughts and other content, it draws us toward our connection to God.

Holiness has been understood at times to describe purity or moral perfection. In everyday life, this may be simply something to strive for, but in symbolic terms it reflects an amplified ideal. Trevor Hart[74] discusses the potential real as well as symbolic sense in which sin and freedom interact. If sin is human nature, what does this say about a Christology which points to what it means to be fully human? It has been observed that the more we cling to any model of sinlessness in the person of Christ, the more precarious the moral conditions that make any soteriology significant. Another way of putting this is that the more we insist on the humanity of Christ, the greater the need to adopt the idea of representative, sinless status for Christ, rather than actual sinless identity.[75]

An alternative understanding for the meaning of Christ with respect to Holiness in moral or ethical terms is through the lens of kenotic Christology. In such visioning, Christ sets aside or renounces certain divine qualities in order to be fully Human. One way this may be understood is by distinguishing between the ontological state of things, or what is, from our noetic condition, or what is known. What is known from above and beyond normal human terms, from the perspective of the Holy, is in contrast with what is

[74] Trevor Hart, In him Was Life: The Person and Work of Christ (Waco, TS.: Baylor University Press, 2019)
[75] Hart, In him Was Life, 245.

known from below and the perspective of sin and temptation. The same ontological reality or nature of being may be conceived from the perspective of the sacred transcendent domain, or through the human eyes of limitation, conflict, and struggle. Indeed, the human psyche involves both knowing, which appears to be the tip of the iceberg, and unknowing or unconscious mind. We may feel free while being motivated by unconscious impressions, traces, and forces.[76]

Faith in the Holy must be lived and practiced, not merely thought. In the first century, what did it mean to be a follower of the Christian way? And what might that mean in contemporary terms? John Dominic Crossan investigates the whole canvass of scriptural sources to triangulate a picture of what this means and how hard it might have been. In the first century, the nuclear family functioned as society in microcosm. That is, the family was an intergenerational seed of the broader power structure in society.[77] Jesus' followers were to leave their families and be re-oriented toward God instead. Traditionally, the dining table was a microcosm of social inclusion. There was an order of seating, and some were welcome while others were not.[78] Sharing with everyone was the example of hospitality demonstrated by Jesus and the origin of the sacramental sense of communion. What was considered clean and unclean in social terms was rejected by touching and welcoming in the practice of healing those whom tradition would not welcome or touch. The notions of honour and shame were turned inside out. To turn against the current of political, social, and economic norms, as this movement required, had to be hard.

[76] Hart, In him Was Life, 246-247
[77] John Dominic Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), 60.
[78] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, 70.

The requirements of this following were tangible practices. Actual things done, on a mundane level, were simultaneously the locations of symbolic activity that pointed to another dimension of reality. However, on the way, these actions passed through the social domain effecting seditious ripples. Our choices of what we eat, with whom we associate, what we do for a living are all located in how we direct the physical body. In fact, Crossan asserts that the body may be considered as a social microcosm.[79] This intersection of the natural, historical, horizontal dimension with the dimension of depth, which may be represented by the vertical axis, is the crucial phenomenon to religious experience and its symbolic expression. This is the meeting of spiritual and empirical realms. It is also the ground on which much interpretive dispute has taken place over how this is possible, what this means for our lives, and how the living symbols of this relationship of multidimensional experience should be understood. A lot depends on whether one describes the experience from the inside out, or from the outside in. It depends on whether we see through the eyes of faith in the Holy, or whether we see from beyond the event horizon of a wholly other.

Presence

Practicing presence with reference to the Holy opens a variety of dimensions of thought and discipline. Presence may be understood in rational terms of space and time. Here we might explore the different possible ways to be present in the material world. Presence between ourselves and the Holy introduces the notion that presence is between variables. The question of how we are present to the Holy thus includes how the Holy is

[79] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, 70.

present at all as well as how the Holy is present to us. We may also distinguish between ideas or philosophical constructs of presence and the quality of experiencing presence itself. Immediate experience does not require rational structure or even language. Presence would seem intuitively to be prior to description. Descriptions are only echoes of events. Events are only ever experienced immediately. Even reading about events of the past or possible events of the future must take place through the lens of reading as being present to ideas in a living moment.

Every moment is qualified differently and their quality has everything to do with the nature and degree of presence. Sitting on a park bench with ears, eyes, and nose open to the smells of autumn, the sound of the birds, and the colours of the leaves has a unique overall quality underlying the specific qualities experienced. This is very different from sitting on the same park bench, yet far away in thought, reliving an argument with a rival and all the emotional turmoil that might bring in tow. Similarly, sitting with another and really hearing with open heart and attention focused on the person speaking is very different from sitting with someone in judgement, rehearsing a response to their words even as these are formed on their lips.

Martin Buber describes a fundamental distinction between two ways of being. The world as experience is represented by what may be described by the word pairing *I-it*. The world of relation is described by the word pairing *I-You*.[80] These different ways of being are both necessary, and in fact, they rely on one another. The *I-it* mode emerges from a natural discreteness, while the *I-You* mode emerges from a natural association.[81]

[80] Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1970), 56.
[81] Buber, I and Thou, 76.

Our sense of separation between subject and object, between I and it, begins in the simple material senses of the body. Relation emerges from detachment. When I see the rose, it is from the recognition that it is outside my body, perceived through intervening space by virtue of light and motes of dust hanging in the air. I see with my eyes, the vision is in my mind, yet the rose is outward and other in the I-it relationship. This being said, even before our birth as distinct beings in the womb, we are in relation of a primal sort. This is why the longing for relation is primary. The sense of *You* comes from the split of primal encounter, from the separation of associated partners.[82]

Vairagya, or non-attachment in the Yoga Sutras, has two forms which might be seen to relate to Buber's twin word pairings. On the one hand, there is the lower form of Vairagya or non- attachment. This first is characterized by disenchantment with the isolated self. Fears and desires are identified as being something to avoid; this is the realm of dying to one's self, but specifically to *asmita* or the separate self.[83] Lower Vairagya reacts against functioning in the field of *I-it* relations where subjects and objects are equally the variables for simple manipulation and causal connection. The second, higher form of Vairagya is characterized positively as yearning for the higher level of being or for what is other than the sense of separate self.[84] What is other than the sense of separate self would be the opening of the dimension of the *I-You* relation.

In Buber's conception, the significance of these contrasting modes of being is one of very different qualities of consciousness and interaction. The objectification of materials and causes is the realm of separation from each other and the world. It is absolutely

[82] Buber, I and Thou, 78.
[83] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 22-23.
[84] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 22.

necessary for fulfilling the logistic requirements of physical life. *It* hangs together in space and time. Relation may not live in the abstract. Relation only exists as presence. An *I-You* relation opens between the events in time and objects in space to reveal a completely different quality than the mundane; this kindles intimations of eternity. *You*, does not hang together in space and time.[85] This says that presence is an essential condition of the apprehension of the Holy.

We oscillate naturally between these two worlds or ways of being. We move from lives characterized largely by abstraction and objectification and manipulation, through moments of encounter and presence, before falling back into everyday consciousness. According to Buber, we cannot abide in the intimacy of pure relational presence.[86] As we move through life, relational moments pass and beings regarded from the relational conscious fall out of resolution into our objectifying awareness.

This is described another way in Ravi Ravindra's discussion of the Bhagavad Gita and how actions may be in accord with *Dharma. Dharma* is a term which may mean order, responsibility, or righteousness. For action to be in accord with Dharma on the horizontal plane of ordinary events, that action must be in reference to eternity. Such reference introduces a different understanding through subtle discernment. Such discernment comes from a radical transformation through which we are freed from polarity and partiality. Here, our actions move from wisdom and compassion. As long as we are confined to simply acting and seeing superficially, without reference to the eternal, we cannot see or act with depth.[87]

[85] Buber, I and Thou, 84.
[86] Buber, I and Thou, 85.
[87] Ravindra, The Bhagavad Gita, 35.

Living at the intersection of separation and relational being is pregnant with possibility in every present instance. It takes work to transition into relation from the habitual mechanics of everyday operations. *Vairagya* is a release of attachment to separation in its lower form and reception of relation in its higher form. However, this work requires an active component, and this is accomplished by practice. Sutra 1:12 states that stillness develops through Practice *(abhyasa)* and non-identification *(vairagya).*[88] *Abhyasa* forms the active component of the effort and volition necessary to let go in either form of *Vairagya*. Together, the active and passive aspects may form a whole, centered individual self.[89]

Closely related to Yoga meditative practice is the practice of mindfulness from the Buddhist tradition. This tradition has gained significant traction in the Western world through the life and work of Thich Nhat Hahn, a Buddhist Monk and peace activist. The practice of mindfulness is rooted in yogic technique where attentiveness to sensations in the body, to feelings, and to thoughts is achieved through concentration on breathing.[90] The goal is focused awareness on the present moment through which the practitioner may develop a non-judgmental disposition towards negative thoughts and feelings. Whereas many of us consider ourselves equivalent to the contents of our minds, in this tradition the more common Western notion of self is an illusion. As the Dalai Lama describes the self, it is a dependent phenomenon contingent upon physical and mental aggregates.[91]

This practice of mindfulness as presence in each everyday activity is in contrast to what Hahn describes as machine thinking. This is habitual, unreflective and reactive

[88] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 19.
[89] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 23.
[90] Mong, " Miracle of Mindfulness," 99-116.
[91] Mong, " Miracle of Mindfulness," 99-116.

living. Nevertheless, through the practice of mindfulness, one may develop a presence in life that allows one to live each moment fully. In this context of presence, every act is a miracle as we open to consciousness of its significance.[92]

Thomas Merton, Trappist monk and author and associate of Thich Naht Hahn, describes this alternative mode of being where the only true joy is to be set free from the prison of our self-hood. In essence, Merton says that everything is Holy, but that the false self exists outside God's presence. In our striving to be autonomous authors of our own actions and lives, we live in exile, outside of reality and of true life. Sin is absence of presence.[93] Thomas Keating, another Christian Monk, describes practices for daily life where we focus on right attention (what we are doing) and right intention (why we are doing it). Keating comes back to awareness and discernment of one's self. For Keating, the spiritual journey begins with consciousness of spiritual self, or true self. Being thus truly grounded in the present moment is as sacred as being in church.[94]

Thomas Dicken[95] distinguishes between a primordial reality and a reality of presence with reference to God. Any suggestions of an ultimate reality or ontological underpinning are of the former sort, whereas the latter represents matters of experience. Experiencing persons have privacy as well as presence, and if God is understood as personal, then God must have deep privacy as well as available presence. In this view,

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[92] Mong, " Miracle of Mindfulness," 99-116.
[93] Mong, " Miracle of Mindfulness," 99-116.
[94] Mong, " Miracle of Mindfulness," 99-116.
[95] Thomas Dicken, "Skepticism, Pluralism, and the Presence of God" Journal of Ecumenical Studies Vol. 47, Issue 2. (Spring 2012) 1-28, http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail/vid=6&sid=7544...gr4006&bdata=JnNpdGu97Whvc3QtbG12ZQ%3d%3d#AN=82745459&db=a9h

any suggestion of ultimate reality must allow for pluralism of irreducible realities. A given experience of presence by an individual may be irreducible, but it is not the only finality. The presence of God appears to us intermittently, like voice in that it leaves no record.[96]

This is described in similar terms by Paul Weiss. The primordial God or ultimate being, which functions as grounding for all events is in contrast to God who is present and experienced in history as a consequence. This second mode may be the direct object of encounter through the experience of faith, worship, or revelation. These two distinct modes form a unity which is sensed by the mystic, and attempted to be explicated by the systemic philosopher. [97]

Gordon James[98] describes the notion of God's omnipresence as a deduction from ideas of God as primordial grounding. This is not something humans experience immediately, as we are local, limited, and particular in time and space. This is simply an idea. What we experience is the play of presence and absence in our awareness of God. This is characteristic of human experience and represents a range of different intensities. Some seek experience of greater intensity, while others flee from the prospect. This speaks to an ambiguity built into the nature of presence; there is an implied possible absence of the experience of God to us despite any assumed omnipresence. This opens a qualitative dimension to presence in addition to the mere spatial dimension.[99]

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[96] Dicken, "Skepticism, Pluralism, and the Presence of God," 3.
[97] Paul Weiss, The God We Seek(Carbondale Il: Southern Illinois University press, 1964), 11.
[98] Dicken, "Skepticism, Pluralism, and the Presence of God," 1-28.
[99] Dicken, "Skepticism, Pluralism, and the Presence of God,"12.

Considering how the individual may be present with respect to the Holy raises the nature of God's presence and a variety of ways that might be understood. Gordon James[100] discusses how different philosophical accounts describe the omnipresence of God. In one reductive view, omnipresence is not a divine attribute in itself but is described by extension from the notions of omniscience and omnipotence. Here, it is simply required logically that being all knowing and all powerful must extend to God being present to all places and people at all times.

The reductive view outlined above draws criticism from thinkers like Eleonore Stump, who point out that God's personal presence must be accounted for and not just temporal and spatial co-ordinates embedded in a mathematical expression in the field of physics. Wherever someone is able and willing to share attention with God, God must be available to share that attention.[101] This introduces the qualitative aspect of presence beyond a purely occupational account of presence.

Process or constructive theology is a way of approaching the Holy by shifting away from what Bradley Siebert[102] describes as implausible, unacceptable, supernatural, anthropomorphized concepts of God. In his discussion of Gordon Kaufman's one world theology, Siebert describes how this approach encourages postmodern participants to adopt a model of salvation oriented toward human fulfillment. Rather than a supernatural

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[100] Gordon, James R. , "Rethinking divine Spatiality: Divine Omnipresence in Philosophical and Theological Perspective" Heythrop Journal Vol. 59, Issue 3. (May 2018) 534-543, http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail/vid=5&sid=7544...gr406&bdata=JnNpdGu97Whvc3QtbG12ZQ%3d%3d#AN=129235709&db=a9h

[101] Eleonore Stump, "Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence," in God, Eternity and Time, ed. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011) 29-47.

[102] Bradley Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics Stemming from Kaufman's One World Christian Theology" The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society Vol. 2 (2013) 1-11, www.religioninsociety.com, ISSN 2154-8633.

theology, the focus in Kaufman's model is how we are to live.[103] At the root of this thinking is the assertion that a theology is always an imaginative construction in history. As such, it is a rhetorical and discursive process and inconsistent with hierarchical, authoritarian models. There is no one way to be authoritative about mystery. Thus, rather than representing a monologue, process theology in this variety is rooted in conversation.[104]

In Kaufman's model, the Trinity is expressed as world, humanity, and God, where world in fact represents the cosmos as our expanding and evolving universal scene. Our biological evolution is an extension of cosmic evolution, and this has primacy over our symbol making. Yet our symbolic contexts provide the systems of meaning that make it possible for us to understand ourselves as selves.[105] Language shapes our constructions of the world, ourselves as humanity, and of God, but this does not mean that we create God. Rather, we fit language together in order to orient ourselves towards what is the ultimate and perennial source of all things and being. God is described by Kaufman as serendipitous creativity.[106]

Serendipitous creativity effectively replaces the anthropomorphic agent with creative motions through which the universe comes to be. This process or motion becomes the one transcendent point to which all may be referred and so relativized. This does not depersonalize experience of the Holy center of creative motion. The Christ category or

[103] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 2.
[104] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 2-3.
[105] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 3-4.
[106] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 5.

construction points to what fulfils our human nature particularly, while we discover and explore this process amongst and between ourselves discursively.[107]

Boiling down the nature of the Holy to the creative process of the unfolding universe, as Kauman does, grounds the conversation of life in the present. It is our choices in this moment that reflect the more or less loving nature of the future we create and our historical understandings of what will be our past. Nevertheless, it remains that only the present may exist at all.

Thomas Shartl discusses the eternity of God and describes the notion of presentism and the idea that the past and the future may not really exist except in ideal terms. Memories and imaginations are always and only experienced through the present moment. In the center of our present moment is the immediate experience, while memory and imagination revolve around the perimeter as mediated references. The Holy might be seen as represented by a super present being. This describes co-presence with every being or event as the understanding of divine eternity.[108]

Hasker Williams[109] asserts that to be present to temporal beings, one must be a temporal being oneself. This would seem on the surface to rule out the eternity of God if there were to remain the possibility of God's presence to humans in time. This position is rejected by Eleonore Stump[110] in her essay, *Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence.* Stump describes how both Hebrew and Christian scriptures portray the ability to know God immediately, directly and personally. If the eternity of God precludes these experiences,

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[107] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 5-6.
[108] Thomas Schartl, "Why We Need Gods Eternity: Some Remarks to Support a classical Notion," in God, Eternity and Time, ed. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011) 47-62.
[109] William Hasker. " God, Time, and Knowledge." (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1989), 169
[110] Stump, "Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence," 29-47.

there is a fundamental disconnect between God and human beings that may be speaking through a false dilemma between eternity and presence. There is no reason, in this view, to suggest that eternity and simplicity must be inconsistent with the personal presence of God.

There is more to presence than simply occupying the same local space. Stump points to different aspects of personal presence beyond mere unmediated causal contact. Personal presence requires cognitive access to another. This may involve shared attention and psychological closeness as well as simply being in the same place at the same time.[111] Thomas Aquinas held the position that eternity of God was not inconsistent with personal presence as well. Indeed, he held that the eternal God can be more present to a human than any temporal being could be. Here, God represents the one infinitely enduring present of eternity which is simultaneous with each moment in time as that time is present.[112]

Robert Pasnau[113] describes a variety of ways to consider presence and the relationship of eternity and time. In his essay, *On Existing All at Once*, he distinguishes between merechronicity and holochronicity. The former refers to an entity which has temporal parts and changes through time. This is to be distinguished from holochronicity, which denotes existing all at once without discrete temporal parts. Holochronicity describes the manner in which both Augustine and Boethius represent God in relation to time, though using different language.[114]

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[111] Stump, "Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence," 31.
[112] Stump, "Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence," 35.
[113] Robert Pasnau, "On Existing All at Once," in God, Eternity and Time, ed. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011) 11-28.
[114] Pasnau, "On Existing All at Once," 12-13.

Pasnau suggests that the eternity attributed to God requires timelessness, and that means either being atemporal or holochronic. If God is to be present in any time, then it must be all times in order to satisfy the principle of divine perfection. Pasnau appears to reject the conception of eternity as duration, which would situate God in time. Rather, what emerges is a relationship to time itself as a quality of creation. This resonates with Aquinas's notion of eternity as being all at once. Eternity does not apply to time as eternity is the measure of permanent being, whereas time is the measure of change or motion.[115]

Presence stands at the center of experience. This may be understood abstractly in purely rational terms which describe the nature of space and time, but more importantly, it introduces a qualitative dimension of being which is crucial to discernment of what is enduring and what is transient. We may be present to the ideas which circumscribe our understanding, or we may be subject to them without awareness. It is possible to be somewhere in space and time without being present, just as it is possible to have ideas without being conscious of them as ideas. Discernment of not only where or when we are in space and time as physical creatures, but also of where we are in heart and mind, are required to begin a true practice of presence. Such practice needs to comprehend not only the mechanics but the subtle qualities of being with immediacy. However, the nature of presence is envisioned or reasoned with respect to the divine; what remains in our grasp is awareness of our every instant and the opportunity it affords to live with a quality of openness in relation to what we may only hope to encounter in the Holy.

[115] Pasnau, "On Existing All at Once," 24.

Absence/Otherness

It is impossible to engage any meaningful exploration of presence with reference to the Holy without addressing the backdrop against which being present is understood. Behind presence is the possibility of absence. This may be understood with reference to ourselves in the ordinary mundane sense of time and space, or the more subtle cognitive sense of awareness. With reference to the Holy, we might rightly observe that we are not always enfolded in the experience of it, or if we are, we are not aware of it. There is the possibility of divine absence; however, this may be understood. The Holy itself has been described as wholly other, and this introduces a connection between what is other and what is same as a subtle variant on what is present and what is absent. Difference and contrast populate our symbol systems, and so, our modes of understanding ourselves and that to which we relate. This is amplified in the attempt to understand our most profound relations whether they be understood as deeply internal or wholly other.

Edward Edinger in *Ego and Archetype*[116] describes the Biblical creation myth in terms of both ethical and psychological significance. The ethical components relate to the crime of separation in terms of gender on the surface, but on a deeper level, it is the crime of consciousness itself. The alienation of consciousness from preconscious wholeness is simultaneously the coming to awareness of opposites. In this model, otherness and relation to the wholly other is reflected in our internal psychological mechanisms.

In Edinger's exposition of concepts developed by psychologist Carl Jung, the Imago Dei is equated with the pre-personal or transpersonal dimension. Themes associated with this dimension are: the unity of opposites; the nexus where God and humans meet: the

[116] Edward F. Edinger, Ego and Archetype (Boston: Shambala Publications Inc., 1992), 18.

intersection of eternity and temporal flux: The Self.[117] This view of the psychological and spiritual significance of the biblical creation story situates primordial estrangement both internal and external to individual experience. It is both social and personal.

In the yoga sutras, both the social and personal experience of estrangement may be seen as addressed in the practice of *vairagya*. This is the Sanskrit term for non-attachment. This must not be mistaken for indifference, but rather it should be understood as commitment to discerning without sentimentality. Attachment to the isolated sense of self engenders fears and desires which bind us to the transient material dimension of life. From this perspective, we cannot see the aspect of the sacred symbol which points to the eternal component of our greater being. When Christ asserts that he and the father are one, it would mean nothing but exclusion to us if seen from the perspective of separate isolated selves. It would be relevant only to the person of Jesus. If seen from the perspective of being released from the sense of separate self, or even having died to one's self, this speaks to a very different truth for many of us. "I and the father are one" speaks essentially the same symbolic truth as the assertion that *Atman* is *Brahman* in the Vedic tradition. [118] The deeper vision is of the unity of being.

Being divided internally is a feature of consciousness which, taken as a whole, functions as a vessel to contain the dynamism of paradox. An ego and a Self or consciousness and unconscious mind constituting wholeness describes to me the connectedness of polar visions of relation to the divine. Certainly, there have been many positions through church history on whether God should be understood as transcendent or immanent or both. The nature of the relation with the divine will be experienced

[117] Edinger, Ego and Archetype, 4.
[118] Ravi Ravindra, The wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 22.

differently from varying states and stages of awareness. They are not identical, but they are connected.

David Odorisio[119] explores this connection as it is described in the observations made by Carl Jung of the symbolic nature of Alchemical practice. Jung used an alchemical hermeneutic to gather evidence for his theory of individuation through cross-cultural study of religious phenomena. The alchemical art through this lens is seen as a psychological projection onto matter. The processes which figuratively transmuted lead into gold were actually aimed at integrating unconscious aspects of being into dawning consciousness or integration. This is, in essence, the process of individuation.[120] In the Western version of alchemical practice, laboratories with crucibles were employed in this symbolic activity. A similar practice has been engaged by some yogis, only they used their own bodies as alchemical vessels. Despite some traditional interpretations of the Yoga sutras as being a dualistic system, others have argued towards an integrative approach in which Spirit (purusha) and Body/mind (prakriti) are engaged, resulting in transformation into a more liberated state of embodied selfhood.[121]

When we seek God or Nirvana, in terms Thich Nhat Hanh might use, we seek a ground of being that cannot be conceived by the human mind through words or concepts.[122] This creates a need to transcend human efforts in pursuit of encounter with ultimate reality. Here is where the function of negative or apophatic theology come into play. Defining the boundaries of what we cannot describe nevertheless leaves us with a perimeter or

[119] David M. Odorisio, "Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Alchemical Process of Individuation" Philosophy East and West, Vol. 65, Issue 3. (July 2015) 717-730, https://doi.org//10.1353/pew.20150063.
[120] Odorisio, "Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Alchemical Process of Individuation" , 717.
[121] David M. Odorisio, "Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Alchemical Process of Individuation" , 718.
[122] Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong, " Miracle of Mindfulness," 99-116.

outline of the matter at hand. They are not identical, the shadow is not the form which cast it, but it is a way of relating that is amenable to language and expression.

The path of wisdom (*Jnana* Yoga) in the Bhagavad Gita is described By Pavulraj Michael[123] as distinguishing God realization from the means to God realization. In short, knowledge of scriptures is not identical to knowledge of God. Two types of knowing are at play here: *manas* analyzes and objectifies concepts, words, and logic, while *buddhi* involves deeper perception and intuits the mystery of deeper reality.[124] *Jnana*, or wisdom, may be distilled into two principles: intense single focus of the mind on God (sphere of *Buddhi*) and the self-control to resist all attachments, except perfecting of the human person (sphere of *manas*).

This gap or distance from ordinary experience of the self and the experience in God-oriented consciousness is described in the Bhagavad Gita as recognizing the need to lose one's life in order to save it. If a person does not recognize the pointlessness and irrelevance of their ordinary life, they will find the true Self to be the enemy of that life. Identification with the mundane or mechanical dimension of being eclipses our perception of deeper connection. Beyond our limited small self is relation to our deeper self, community, society, cosmos, and ultimately God.[125]

In this sense, otherness must be experienced and processed on the path to realizing Self and, in turn, relating to the Holy. Our connection to a deeper sense of Self and to the Holy is a connection experienced through differentiation. In Jungian terms, this differentiation is the circumstance through which integration takes place. In an

[123] Michael, "Jnana Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita ,"195-226.
[124] Michael, "Jnana Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita," 203.
[125] Michael, "Jnana Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita," 212.

alchemical analogy, aspects of our being are separated out, discerned, or distilled, before reintegration into a more evolved differentiated whole. Yoga and the Yoga sutras in this light may be seen as a separation of spirit and matter—not in a final sense, but on a path to integration and wholeness. In the words of David Odorisio: "In Patanjali Yoga, emotion sensation, visualization and cognition are systematically dissolved (solutio), separated out (separatio), and finally reintegrated (conjunctio) into a more aligned, synthesized, or individuated whole."[126] The outer limbs of practice become the container/crucible for the practice of the inner limbs. *Tapas,* heat provides the energy, which may disrupt or disturb the sovereignty of our small selves or egos leading to a shift in perception of self. Such shifts may be experienced as profound states of transcendence, oneness, or peace. Nevertheless, with each return, the practitioner reassembles or reintegrates at a different place or level.[127]

Absence or otherness is not just an external phenomenon. It is not just an abstract category into which we place this or that thing we fear or fail to understand. In the Yoga sutras, *abhinivesha* is the hinderance linked to attachment to the status quo; more fundamentally, for mortal life, it is associated with the fear of death. This is not just a personal experience—it is common to everyone, it pervades the natural world, and in the twenty-first century, it may be focused on the global experience of instability and environmental crisis. Panu Pihkala[128] describes how, to many people, climate change feels like death. This may explain the large-scale avoidance of environmental matters because of this unconscious link to mortality. No matter how we attempt to cope,

[126] David M. Odorisio, "Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Alchemical Process of Individuation," 720.
[127] David M. Odorisio, "Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and the Alchemical Process of Individuation," 722.
[128] Phhkala P.,"Death, the environment and theology",Wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/dial (2018) Dialog. 20118: 57:287-294. https://doi.org/1111/dial.12437

whether from an emotional standpoint, a pragmatic problem-focused approach, or in attempting to find meaning to the crisis, we are enveloped by our environmental crisis like a vast dark shadow.[129]

In this era, there is no avoiding the links between eco anxiety and existential anxiety. The macrocosm of our world/cosmos is brought down to specific personal experience of threat. We are tied somehow in tangible terms to greater ontological insecurity. Where the natural world or cosmos is continuous with the body of God, what does this say about theological symbols that link natural, material, social, and personal forms of meaning and behavior? The scope of our challenge is not just social in this context but built on the foundations of personal choices and their connection to the broadest of all ecumenical households, the cosmos.

These choices that connect us in broader relationships as responsible beings evolve from our agency and freedom within evolved limits. This forms the first of three loving attitudes in Walter Kaufman's one world theology: responsibility, charity and humility. These three are interpreted as central to the evolution of love as process in the unfolding of the universe.[130] All three embody a tension along boundaries between otherness and identity.

Reality is overwhelmingly experienced through symbol systems, yet what the symbol systems represent is the tiny sliver of that reality which is experienced first-hand and as immediately present. The implications of this divide between what we think as reality and what we experience directly has been described by Bradley Siebert as being similar

[129] Phhkala, "Death, the environment and theology," 285.
[130] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 6-7.

to peeking over an abyss.[131] In this space between what we actually know and what we think we know is where we encounter our responsibility for creating reality. We must choose our words carefully if we are committed to truth. The depth of honesty in our choices is significant in shaping our physical and cultural habitats as well as maintaining theology as a free-flowing conversation. [132] It is significant that *satya*, or truth, is second of the *yamas* or self-restraints named in the Yoga sutras.

Joel Burnett[133] observes that depictions of divine presence are unusual in the Hebrew scriptures. Burnett suggests that there is a positive side to the hiddenness of the divine that imparts a sense of freedom to humanity in the context of the mystery of the unseen. This divine absence is something that was shared with Near Eastern neighbours and is always raised in explicit relationship with the individual and the group. This crisis which absence poses to divine human relationship translates into the relational reciprocity exercised between people. Burnett asserts that the divine human relationship is modeled after the servant/master patronage relationships of male patrimonial society.[134]

In the Ancient Near East, the broader social structure of society was organized around the model of the single household, where the microcosmic order was replicated on a larger scale on all levels of social complexity. In this system, covenant was the mechanism for individuals and groups to establish faithfulness and loyalty. This was not established through mechanics of descent or lineage, but by choice. This choice to enter into covenant was a way of both moving beyond divine absence while coming to know

[131] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 7.
[132] Siebert, " Rhetorical Ethics," 6.
[133] Joel S. Burnett. Where is God: Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010)
[134] Burnett, Where is God, 15.

God through establishing bonds of relationship and identity at distant yet interrelated levels of social organization.[135]

With Yahweh's first question to humanity from Genesis 3:9— "Where are you?" —the stage is set for God's relation to humans in the world. Terrence Fretheim[136] describes a structural divine presence where that presence or absence is experienced with degrees of intensification along a continuum. At one end of the continuum is full theophany, while at the other end, is the simple accompanying sense of not feeling alone. The relationship between presence and absence forms a general structural undergirding of all creation where the experience of absence is a lesser degree of the intensification of a divine presence that is the constant.[137]

Even in the context of such models of structural absence, the hiddenness or self-disclosure of God may come down to human perception. Such perception, however, remains a function of creation where the creator God made such limitation and so chooses hiddenness for the mystery of the relationship. This mystery is linked to theodicy and the relationships that grow from otherness and difference or presence and absence. This emerges from the original condition prior to creation: God's isolation from anything meaningful in a beginning of amorphous barren disorder. In this reading of creation, the transcendent God creates humankind in order for a relationship to occur. In order for that relationship to be free and authentic, there must be a clear distinction between divine and human identities and prerogatives.

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[135] Burnett. Where is God, 25.

[136] Terrence E Fretheim. God and the World in the Old Testement: A relational Theology of Creation (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005)

[137] Fretheim, God and the World in the Old Testement,

Creation, as the source of the cosmos and the world, places the relationship between God and the world, or more specifically between God and humanity, in a difficult place. The difficulty is that the source of creation as uniquely other introduces a seemingly seminal separation between what we are and where we come from. This otherness has been described by Trevor Hart[138] as a source of abuse socially and politically when it is amplified and reified. At the same time, the Christian notion of all humanity in the likeness of God introduces a form in common as the foundation of community linked to our very origins.

At the root of our perplexing relationship with what is other are questions about how we know otherness, even if we can have such knowledge past a certain point. One position is that what is genuinely other may not be known at all. Like is only known by like. From this position, any knowledge of God or the Holy must suppose that humanity is in some sense divine. This is a place to tread carefully as there is a tendency from here for either the deification of the human or the reduction of the divine to the level of creaturely projections.[139] If like is known by like, human particularity may become a stumbling block in developing an account of universal relevance for the incarnation of Jesus. Another position discussed by Hart is the notion of other only being known by other. Here, the principle of dialectic describes the way differences interact in the process of knowing. Here, where God is conceived as wholly other, relationship would exist internal to the trinitarian formula between dimensions or aspects of the divine. What is crucial in this view is that knowledge of difference and knowledge of self or

[138] Trevor Hart, In him Was Life, 279.
[139] Trevor Hart, In him Was Life," 283.

sameness arise together through a dialectical process.[140] Spirit and nature interact in relationship which both connects and distinguishes one from the other.

Concepts of the Holy cover the spectrum from describing apophatically that which is beyond all conceivable knowledge and experience, to describing everything in creation as potential vehicles of revelation. These distinctions in understanding the Holy speak perhaps to distinction as a foundational quality of our minds and languages. We understand relation through contrast, and this requires discrete terms, but the quality of such a relationship may be experienced as difference or kinship. Relative to the perspective we engage, our relation to the Holy might be over great distance or it might be in intimate proximity. We may imagine the idea of the immutable, but we are always changing. We may conceive of an entity that is in all places at all times, but we are finite and our eyes close when we sleep.

Regardless of our variable nature, we can direct and discipline ourselves to a certain extent. We may not be able to grasp what is beyond our understanding, but we may focus our attention on the horizon that defines the edges of understanding. This describes simultaneously the openness to what lies beyond and discernment of what lies at hand. Within our grasp is the potential to remain within this resolution of vision which regards both sides, one through the other, as the lens which brings the meaning of our contrasting experience into focus. We may not be able to comprehend the Holy in its entirety or embody associated principles fully, but we may be present in our partiality to greater and greater degrees in relationship with these experiences and intuitions. Such intuitions form

[140] Trevor Hart, In him Was Life," 281.

the connection between our wholeness and union with the great mystery and our particularity as distinct instances within it.

Chapter Three: The Methodological Map

The methodology for this research process has been a blended one. The general framework of Moustakas' heuristic model was a natural starting place as I have found it to be a reflection of an organic problem solving and discovery process. Just as Sela-Smith discovered in her personal self-study experience prior to having been introduced to Moustakas' model, I found the six stages he outlined to reflect my own natural cycle of discovery.[141] These stages appear to reflect an innate inner process common to different searchers and researchers.

I found from my first introduction to the heuristic cycle of Clark Moustakas that the stages he outlined were familiar, though through varying time scales, to my own intuitive process of navigating deeper questions. Feeling centered, open-ended initial engagement is a natural starting point. The following stage of excavating the question before a stage of immersion is something I have always done. Stepping back and allowing ideas and impressions to incubate until they arrive at a stage of clarity is the way I have always approached research and life dilemmas. It might be tempting to assume that the articulation of discovery in a stage of explication and then its synthesis into different forms or media is the research, but these are only parts of the tip of the iceberg in this process.

These stages cannot be rushed, but they need not be protracted into any particular scale. In my experience with this project, I traveled through these stages several times on different levels as I felt my way through to the proposal stage and then beyond. The project is not an isolated cycle of these stages but a snapshot of a continuum of these

[141] Sandy Sela-Smith, "Heuristic Research: A Review and Critique of Moustakas Method," Journal of Humanistic Psychology vol. 42, no. 3 (Summer 2002):54.

stages happening naturally in ongoing self-discovery. It is more a helix than a closed circle. As I cycled through stages of exploration and discovery, I repeatedly came full circle, returning back around to the same question but from a changed perspective with new insights. These changed the nature of the next cycle, as I, the researcher, had changed.

My experience of Christianity has emerged as being one of self-discernment, directed towards alignment with the Holy, expressed in each gesture of life both personally and with others in the social dimension. This is a heuristic process; the process is guided intuitively, yet grounded in experimentation. My experience of Yoga has revealed itself to be an analogue to this vision of the Christian way, which reflects dimensions of contrast in both traditions with respect to each other. As both may be considered heuristic processes, this project has been very much a heuristic study of the experience of contrasting but related heuristic methods. This is less complicated than it sounds at first, as the field of resolution remains focused on a central point.

Felt experience of presence has been the central point of focus at the intersection of these two practices. It has both physiological and psychological dimensions that are respectively nuanced with resistance, shadow, and struggle. In both practices, there is an internal personal dimension and an external social one, which both reflect each other as circumstance changes. Prayer is very personal, whereas action towards justice in the world is very social and political. The first five limbs of Yoga are practices in the world of action, while concentration and meditation toward free attention are interior processes.

The struggle to establish and maintain presence has had to take place in the dimension of firsthand, felt experience, engaging the unseen and unrecognized in relation to myself

and the Holy. However, the explication that is theology was necessarily abstracted from such experience. There was also the intermediate experience of felt relationship to ideas themselves and personal reaction to concepts that are actualized in the world. Denominational division, boundaries of identity, metaphysical models, dialectic formulas are all ideas or contents of the thinking me that engender different feelings to the degree that they hinder or serve the feeling me.

The different components of these two practices have been brought together into a single journal of experience. Action in the world, whether it is experienced or understood in reference to Christian tradition or Yogic discipline, is the first component. Personal interior contemplation, whether identified as prayer or as meditation, is the second component. Dreams, which so often reflect the unseen or undiscovered on the edge of emerging awareness of self and mystery, are the subject of the third component. Ideas about any one of the above are also a distinct, synthetic fourth component. A single journal of living in the world, of prayer, of yoga and of dreams places the inside, the outside, and the liminal together in a position for self-dialogue within and between dimensions of experience.

In preparation for this project, I developed a steady discipline to engage these four components through specific tasks. First, I began with forming a practice of journaling every morning. There was no length requirement. I nevertheless aimed to write at least 250 words, even if I began by thinking I had nothing to say. Every morning I recorded my dreams.

The second task was a daily practice of asana and sitting meditation. The journal also reflects on the experiences of internal and external limbs of Yoga. There is an

intimate relationship between the disciplines practiced in yoga and the states of mind they engender. There is often a blurred transition from preparation to prayer, hence my experience in prayer became a part of the journaling record.

The third task was a daily study of theology and philosophy relating to this project. Each morning, the day after a reading, I reflect on the impressions I have of my study materials after having lived with them through the preceding day. This served both to externalize and review study material as well as weave the ideas of others into the process of my practice. Ideas can help or they can hinder. Living with them through a day and then "sleeping on them" through the night can bring them into a visceral relationship with my other feeling dimensions of being.

The fourth task was observation of how everything else going on in my life poured into the journaling process. Relating these practices with my daily experiences gave both personal and social context, opening this work outward beyond its own horizon and into a social landscape.

The fifth task was in active, reflective interaction with these elements of the journaling process. Conversing with dreams, dialoging with felt experience from the day, considering how ideas resonate with my intuitive sense are all ways of circling back around to the central question from many different circumstances. Letting this discipline take its own path without my control was perhaps the hardest part. I needed discipline to keep the practice going, but without imposing its direction or expecting any result in particular.

Dimensions of Yoga Practice

The practice of Yoga is multidimensional. That is, it may be accessed from many different approaches. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are the oldest comprehensive collection of teachings in yoga compiled sometime between the third century BCE and the third century CE. They are a series of concise statements designed to be explored and elaborated in practice. There are many translations of the Yoga Sutras, but I have chosen to chiefly employ Ravi Ravindra's, as it describes the different subtle choices in translation while making the concepts approachable from a variety of traditions or backgrounds.[142]

Patenjali's Yoga Sutras describe a process for purification, or removing obstructions toward discernment. There are eight dimensions or limbs to this practice which is the meaning of the term *ashtanga*. Five of these limbs are external in nature, while three are internal. Each of the eight limbs are necessary, but there is no rigid order in which they must be engaged.[143] They may be observed simultaneously or individually, but they feed into one another regardless of what sequence would be most appropriate to the individual.

The first limb described in the Sutras is called *yama*. This means self-restraint and is for the development of conscience. There are five *yamas*, the first of which is *ahimsa* or non-violence. Ahimsa is more subtle though than simply an injunction against physical harm; it includes any misplaced force such as manipulation, interference, or violation. In a purely physical sense, force against resistance is essential to action in the world. Nevertheless, what distinguishes appropriate force is the intention, motives, and

[142] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, xii.
[143] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 85.

relationships in which it is enmeshed. The development of conscience provides insight for *ahimsa* even in the circumstance of struggle.[144]

The second *yama* is called *satya*, or truth. This is not just being honest with others, but also honest with oneself. Exaggeration, assertions beyond immediate knowledge, and partiality are all ways in which we may distort truth, whether we deceive ourselves or others.[145]

The third *yama* is called *asteya*, or not stealing. On the most surface level, this seems clear, but there are ways in which a person can take what is not theirs which are not so obvious, such as when someone accepts more than they deserve, or enjoys privilege without recognizing attendant responsibility.[146]

The fourth *yama* is *brahmacharya*, or containment. This is often focused on sexuality, but involves more. *Brahmacharia* means to dwell in *Brahman*, or the vastness. In this light, it may also indicate freedom from pride, self-occupation, or importance. Here, our sexuality, our speaking, thinking, and feeling all need to be in right balance between deprivation and indulgence.[147]

The last of the y*amas* is *aparigraha*. This means non-grasping or resisting greed, and like the other *yamas*, it goes beyond just the obvious material level. Greed may be for anything including goods, power, knowledge, and feelings associated with experiences. There is both a material and a psychological dimension to greed.[148]

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[144] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 85.
[145] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 88.
[146] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 89.
[147] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 89-90.
[148] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 91.

The second limb of Yoga is *nyama* or observances. There are five observances, the first of which is *saucha,* or purity. Though this may be understood in terms of physical cleanliness, it is more than just hygiene. *Saucha* is perhaps more importantly having to do with the mind than with the body. Ravindra points out that what we feel is closer to Spirit than is what we do with the body.[149] What we seek purification from is essentially the hinderances or *kleshas*.

The second *nyama* is called *santosa* This means contentment. Contentment should not be mistaken for heedless passivity or blind acceptance, but rather as stemming from discernment, which frees us from the impulse to acquire transient things in order for our attention to be on what is essential to the soul. In this light, personal thoughts and feelings which engender desires and fears are placed in the proper place subordinate to the greater aim of yoga, which is establishing consciousness in the supra-personal realm beyond thought and emotion.[150]

The third of the *nyamas* is *tapas*. This means self-discipline and austerity. It may also be translated as the heat generated by great effort. Discipline requires going against the grain, doing what is harder but ultimately for the better. There are higher and lower orders of consciousness and spiritual sensitivity. The effort and discipline of *tapas* is engaged to bring the lower under the direction of the higher orders of consciousness. Our habitual behaviours and indulgent impulses often represent the path of least resistance, and *tapas* is required to provide both positive and negative sanctions which direct us against the current of automatic thinking, feeling, and acting.[151]

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[149] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 93.
[150] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 94.
[151] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 57.

The fourth *nyama* is called *svadyaya*. This may be translated as the study of scriptures, but is more importantly understood as the study of self. Our every small gesture, whether it be voice, body language, or our internal attitudes or our social behaviors, are all subjects for self-observation and discovery. Ravindra points out that the deeper the level of inquiry into the self, the more general the condition that is approached. As self-inquiry deepens, the study of self becomes the study of broader humanity. In the Indian tradition, the deepest self or *atman* is identical with the highest universal self or *Brahman.*[152]

The fifth *nyama* is *ishvara pranidana*, which means devotion to God. In the Indian tradition as with the Christian gnostic tradition, this is expressed in the belief that God lives in the deepest part of each one of us. In terms of Yoga, this lies beyond our physical nature, which is the realm of *Prakriti*. Such devotion is to an aspect of being which is beyond suffering, actions, results, and intentions.[153]

Of the eight limbs of ashtanga, *asana* or right alignment, is the third. This is most commonly what people think about in association with Yoga. In fact, many practice *asana* in the belief that this is all there is to Yoga; however, the practice of right alignment is more subtle. Patanjali mentions no postures in particular in the Yoga Sutras. Even the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, an early and extensive manual of Yoga techniques, only describes eight postures, whereas dozens have been catalogued and described by such renowned teachers as B.K.S Iyengar in the Light on Yoga.[154] The Indian Government

[152] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 58.
[153] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 59.
[154] B.K.S Iyengar, Light on Yoga (London: Aquarian press, 1999).

created a digital library of traditional knowledge which included one thousand three hundred distinct yoga postures.[155]

What is essential to *asana* is not the number or depth of outward expression of the physical postures, but the awareness in the posture. Right alignment is accompanied by steadiness (*sthira*) and ease *(sukham*). Much of our physical dispositions in the world are unconscious and bearers of tension that is constrictive. No matter what posture is practiced, whether singularly or in a sequence of many, physical attitude relates to consequent emotional attitude and mental attitude.[156] Awareness of these dimensions of posture provides the opportunity to release and move toward complete relaxation. The release of tension is a release of inner dualities and seeks balance between active and passive principles. This dissolution is part of the path towards fusion with the Infinite, according to the Yoga Sutras.[157]

The fourth of the eight limbs of Yoga is *pranayama.* This may be described in simple terms as the regulation of breath. The Sanskrit term *prana* includes breath in the fold of a much broader meaning. Prana may be described as the energy permeating all levels of the universe. Iyengar describes prana as physical, mental, intellectual, sexual, spiritual, and cosmic energies; the life breath of all beings in the universe.[158]

Pranayama as the regulation of breath in right alignment cultivates depth and subtlety of breath. Breath is intimately connected with our emotional state and so is the functioning of our cognition. How we think and feel is reflected in our breathing from

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[155] Jain, "Who Is to Say Modern Yoga Practitioners Have It All Wrong?", 427-471.
[156] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 103.
[157] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 104.
[158] B.K.S Iyengar, Light on Pranayama: The yogic Art of Breathing (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2010), 12.

moment to moment, and more generally in the way we breath habitually. Conversely, the practice of regulated breath can consciously influence the way we feel and the quality of consciousness. Ordinary breath, however, is the least subtle aspect of prana.[159] Ravindra describes Pranayama as the expansion internally of what is usually external. This may mean the material exercise of breath in literal terms, but also, and more importantly, it points to the movement of breath as Spirit in symbolic terms. Here, there is an interpenetration of psyche and cosmos that expresses the concept of an isomorphism, or correlation in form, between the microcosm of the human psychosomatic organism and the macrocosmic context for that organism: the universe. In this tradition, attentive breath focused on different parts of the body illuminates different dimensions of self and cosmos.[160] It is interesting to note that *pneuma* in Greek is both breath and spirit, while *ruah* in Hebrew also means both breath and spirit.

The fifth of the eight limbs of Yoga is called *pratyahara*, or the withdrawal of the senses. What is sensed still remains, but the aim of *pratyahara* is to withdraw attachment and then attention to external stimuli. Here, the attention is tuned inward. Internal distractions or movements of the mind may remain, but isolated from the fuel of outside influences and new stimuli, they may be more easily studied and addressed. First, the senses of external distractions are disciplined. Then, the internal realm of the mind may begin to be purified.[161] This does not mean that there is nothing experienced, or that *pratyahara* leads to no sound or kinetic activity. Ravindra describes silence and stillness

[159] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 106.
[160] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 107.
[161] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 109.

not as absolute empirical conditions, but as qualities of experience quite apart from motion or sound. Stillness and silence are characteristics of presence.[162]

Where the first five limbs described in the Yoga Sutras are considered external, the last three are considered internal. The sixth limb is called *dharana* or concentration. This is the effort to hold the mind in one place. *Dhyana*, the seventh limb, means meditation, which is an uninterrupted flow of awareness towards the object of meditation. *Samadhi*, the eighth limb, is free attention, or that state when distinction between the self and the object of meditation dissolves.

These three internal limbs of yoga may be considered one continuous process of internalization. *Dharana*, or concentration, is active and directed in its focus. *Dhyana* is more receptive and open to subtleties and relationships. *Samadhi*, or free attention, represents objectivity in the true sense that there is no self or subject. Ravindra describes these three in symbolic terms as warrior, lover, and beloved respectively.[163]

Samadhi might be mistakenly thought to describe an egoless state or the destruction of the ego, but Ravindra describes ego as being important. Ego is like a vessel which serves us on our spiritual voyage, but it does not have to be in control. Self-study is seeing and acknowledging the machinations of the ego or small self, and returning over and over again to the sense of our real deeper Self.

For the most part, we do not live in actuality from the truth of our deepest identity, we live unconsciously, mechanically, in illusion or sinfulness, depending on the

[162] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 110.
[163] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 116.

nomenclature of the tradition from which we come. [164] *Samyama* is the simultaneous practice of all three internal limbs. This is accomplished gradually and in stages.[165]

There are significant points of analogy between traditional Yoga described in the Yoga Sutras and the techniques suggested by Moustakas in heuristic research methodology. In most general terms, both are engaged from the beginning and throughout with self-discovery. In Moustakas' academic procedure, we are enjoined to write from the point of contact with the phenomenon, which is to say, from our own perspectives.[166] I am the point of interface with phenomenon. In the context of this project, I am the occasion of presence or absence, and any relationship that I may have with the experience of the Holy. The initial data is within me, and it is from self-exploration that essential meanings of experience may be discerned from the distractions that invariably accompany complexities of life. This process of discernment is aimed at exactly the same thing, whether in Moustakas heuristic methodology or in a serious Yoga practice: awakening and transforming the self.[167]

Self-dialogue is a technique emphasized by Moustakas as permeating the heuristic process from beginning to end. This requires that there be different fields of identity, or put another way, different levels of awareness within the individual. By enacting the points of contrast between these aspects of awareness, they may be distinguished from each other. For example, I may ask myself the question: why do I feel this way? I do not know exactly why, but ideas arise nevertheless. I put myself in the position of the

[164] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 117
[165] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 119.
[166] Clark Moustakas, Heuristic Research: Design, methodology, and Applications (London: Sage Publications, 1990),
[167] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 13.

various options and experience varying degrees of resonance with the explanation or dissonance. Closer examination might reveal desire at the heart of resonance, or fear at the heart of dissonance. I must engage the different ideas which pop up like I would wear a set of clothes. I have to inhabit the idea which follows the feeling in order to get past my own internal barriers and road blocks. Moustakas describes an inverted perspective where one imagines being the object of study.[168] This comes close to describing the meditative process except that oneself is the object of imaginary identity. Who I think or imagine I am must be explored in order to distinguish between passing qualities of being and who I am in essence.

On the one hand, self-dialogue elucidates a sense of a whole identity, but on the other hand, it does so through contrast with particular elements. Moustakas describes this in terms of moving from a perception of the whole object to that of a part of the object, and then back to the whole. This may also be described in terms of moving from the overall feeling to the explicit verbal description, then back to the feeling.[169] This is analogous to observing the movements of the mind and distinguishing them from the subject itself in preliminary Yoga practice. As such, I might be engaged in a deep hip-opening posture. As the intensity increases, I feel something akin to anger, which translates into resistance to the posture. I am aware of the emotional response to the physiological challenge and wonder to myself: where is the anger coming from? I feel trapped in the posture, claustrophobic in this discomfort. Different associations with this feeling pass through my mind from circumstances that have led me to feel this way. As I explore and release the ideas of explanation for the feeling of anger, the anger subsides. As the anger

[168] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 16.
[169] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 16.

subsides, I become aware of the tension I hold in my hip resisting the posture. Gently, in degrees, I am able to let go and relax into the challenging posture. This latitude in perspective that is gained through self-dialogue is employed to begin to distinguish explicit contents of awareness from tacit organizing structures that may function beneath our awareness.

This heuristic process in terms of yoga practice might be described as beginning with a general sense of feeling at a given time, then moving to specific experience, such as tension in a certain bodily tissue, or a thought that emerged in a challenging moment of practice before returning to the sense of the whole. By sifting finer and finer grains, we approach the essential nature of that substance we explore, which in this case is ourselves. This self-dialogue process may be linguistically expressed, but it may also follow non-linear, non-verbal pathways. Feeling can be expressed tonally with sound such as chanting or singing, or with form and movement as in dance or asana. Whatever medium best expresses the operative feeling of the moment is the best mode of expression.

Self-dialogue both requires and aims towards self-disclosure. In terms of heuristic research, this is about discernment. I sought to discern not only what is immediate to an experience, but also what underlies my evaluations of the experience and how I understand it in reference or contrast to my whole being.[170]

In Patanjali's terminology, this is an example of where the practice and cultivation of *Satya*, or truth, takes place. In order to be honest in my outward expressions, I must know the truth about myself, and this requires exploration. This exploration involves

[170] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 16-17.

body, breath, thoughts, deeds, and words. The whole human psychosomatic organism is expressive in one way or another. Our breath is in dialogue with our thoughts and feelings, which are in dialogue with our physical state, which is in conversation constantly with our immediate environment. Fears of the future and memories from the past join the conversation, and it becomes clear that the truth requires examination and exploration in a multidimensional sense.

The immersion stage of Moustakas heuristic methodology when translated into practicing presence is expressed in the practice of the eight limbs of yoga. These are not simultaneously experienced, but each in turn, as I move through different contexts and challenges. Presence becomes the continuity between, for the example, the intention and extension of my words in my commitment to *satya* or truth, and my attention to posture and its relation to breath in a moment of alarm or discomfort. The multidimensional nature of the eight limbs allows the practice of presence to be observed with continuity in many different ways as I engage in the immersion stage with regard to presence.

What we believe most deeply may not be what we see or understand explicitly, and furthermore, may or may not be the truth. Moustakas describes different types of knowledge which may inhabit our thoughts and feelings. At the root of Heuristic research and its various concepts is the importance of tacit knowledge.[171] There are different elements or ways in which we experience knowing. Explicit knowledge is comprised of subsidiary elements that are consciously experienced. They are distinctive and seen, and describable and unique aspects to phenomenon. Tacit knowledge reflects focal elements that are implicit or subliminal. They are integral to a phenomenon as unifying or organizing

[171] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 20.

principles. The aim of Moustakas' heuristic model is to discover and potentially transform tacit knowledge that is mistaken and hinders us.[172] The same is true of Yoga. Passing beneath surface contents of explicit knowledge to establish awareness of not only what is known but how and by whom it is known is a requirement for transformation. Yoga, however, is not just for transformation towards health and psychological wellness. Wellness is striven for as preparation to be receptive to ultimate orders of experience.

In the Moustakas model, intuition plays an important role. Intuition functions as a bridge between tacit knowing and explicit knowledge. This is important as the connections between organizing structures and explicit knowledge are not always logically derived. A particular mode of tacit knowing may be flawed, which may lead to flawed interpretations of explicit experience. The intuitive inference follows feeling back to the underlying assumption without the intervening steps of logic or reasoning.[173]

Moustakas describes a process called indwelling, through which the researcher turns inward to explore the meaning or quality of an experience. In his words: "It involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness."[174] This is a deliberate process, yet it is non-lineal or logical. As such, it relies on intuition to bridge between tacit and explicit aspects of knowing an experience. The intuitive inference may skip the necessity for intervening steps of logic or reasoning in apprehending the relationship between subsidiary factors of knowledge and their underlying structures in the tacit dimension of awareness.[175]

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[172] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 23.
[173] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 23.
[174] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 24
[175] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 23-24

Indwelling as a specific process bears remarkable similarity with the internal limbs of Yoga, which Ravindra describes as part of a single process. Concentration on one thing (*dhyana)* in an active focused way dissolves/resolves into meditation (*dharana*), which is passive and receptive of relationships. This, in turn, gives way to the possibility of the true objectivity of free attention (*samadhi)* or insight. In a more preliminary practice, just noticing what comes up as a distraction when attempting to remain focused on the breath may reveal the nature of unrecognized struggles or barriers to practice that may not even have been explicitly apparent, but surface nevertheless and may resonate with the intuition as something to explore.

Just as *pratyahara* or withdrawal of the senses along with the other outer limbs of Yoga are preparatory for the internal limbs of yoga, so does focusing serve as a process that enables the heuristic procedure outlined by Moustakas. Focusing is described as clearing an inner space for the exploration of thought and feeling surrounding the question. Focusing creates a relaxed and receptive state that enables greater clarity by removing clutter and setting aside peripheral distractions.[176]

Focusing describes an analogue to the preparatory postural, respiratory, and sensory disciplines that prepare the yoga practitioner for the inner limbs of yoga described by Patanjali. Removing clutter and distinguishing the peripheral from the essential reflect the attention to distraction outlined at the very outset of the Yoga Sutras. Establishing the mind in stillness requires discerning the mind itself from the movements or contents of the mind. In order to seek one pointed attention (*ekagrata)*, a space must be created

[176] Moustakas, Heuristic Research, 25.

where attention to distraction and discernment between the nature of the contents of the mind may take place.

The model of inquiry described by Moustakas is useful, but not without some weaknesses. Sandy Sela-Smith suggests that Moustakas' model slips into inconsistency in its methodological approach. She points out a shift in focus that takes place between the first and second half of the outlined method. In the first two chapters, Moustakas describes an open-ended approach that is free of strict methodological structures. This work takes place in an unconfined way that supports self-honesty, self–dialogue, and self-disclosure. However, in the third and fourth chapters of his work, she identifies a qualitative shift toward examination of phenomena as objective, or observed experience. There is also a shift away from the examination of self toward the study of others.[177]

This reflects a common distraction in Yogic practice. All too often, we begin with one point of focus, but subtle abstraction takes place that separates our attention from the object to thoughts about the object. We end up thinking about practice rather than doing it. Sela-Smith offers a descriptive alternative from what Moustakas simply called *Heuristic Research* to what she would call *heuristic self-inquiry*. The former is open to the study of external situations, while the latter remains focused on internal experience.[178] This is based on the observation that co-participants create confusion, which can add to an already ambiguous use of language with varying perspective and meaning. What occurs all too often is a shift from experience of self and self-search, to observation of the experience of self and others.[179]

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[177] Sandy Sela-Smith, "Heuristic Research: A Review and Critique of Moustakas Method," Journal of Humanistic Psychology vol. 42, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 71.
[178] Sela-Smith, Heuristic Research, 71.
[179] Sela-Smith, Heuristic Research, 71.

Sela Smith offers a way out of this labyrinth by maintaining the initial focus of Moustakas' model. Feeling from pre-verbal, body-based global experience is how she describes the best way to interact with the realms of tacit knowledge. This stems from the idea that language can have an alienating effect on self-experience. Though it can enhance interpersonal experience on the one hand, it also introduces a split on the other hand between what is spoken and what is known.[180]

There needs to be a way to prevent the shift away from feeling and following the intuitive process into reporting and summarizing in the abstract. Autoethnography as a methodological tool may serve this cause. First-person account, situated in the immediacy of experience, may serve to ground explanation in the subject it aims to explain. Here, the medium is as close as possible to the message itself as abstraction of language, from what it describes, is minimized. Speaking with my voice in the context of my experiences brings me right down to the here and now.

There were two ongoing issues in this project. One element was the theory, theology, and philosophy behind the traditions of Christianity and Yoga, while the other was the experience of the practices that were represented in those Ideas. Sara Wall describes the postmodern roots of autoethnography as a methodological study practice. Characteristic of postmodern theory is the breakdown of the facade of objectivity. There are many ways to know and come to know. No one way is privileged.[181]

For a heuristic process to be authentic, it needs to be grounded in living personal experience, even when that is the experience of abstract ideas and theological principles.

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[180] Sela-Smith, Heuristic Research, 62.

[181] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on learning about Auto Ethnography" Journal of Qualitative methods Vol. 5 no. 2 (June 2006): 2.

Otherwise, the work is rendered as little more than summary and interpretation of the work of others. The crucial element is inclusion of the researcher's voice.[182]

No matter how disciplined the practice, there is the inevitability of distraction, diversion, and digression. Resistance against exploring challenging personal places can lead me down endless rabbit holes, in academic study and in meditative self-study. Knowing when it is happening is the first and most important tool. As Sela-Smith pointed out, voice can be a signpost to such digression, but the use of first-person narrative does not mean that it is not abstraction from the first-person experience. Opening the medium of expression to include different first-person literary genres such as stories, poetry, or layered writing may serve two purposes. First, it may provide a way to distinguish between presentations of the ideas of others in the literature discussed from my experiences of those ideas by presenting them in contrasting forms. The second service this approach may provide is to enable what Sarah Wall calls thick descriptions, or fuller pictures of what may very well defy conventional means of expression. There is a possibility with auto ethnography to make experience, even experience of the abstract, explicit rather than letting it be inferred through a third-person voice.[183]

The Navigated Territory

The discipline developed for this thesis project did not simply begin abruptly when the proposal was accepted; it had to be built and nurtured in components over a long time. Yoga is a life-long practice. Dream work takes learning and practice as well. Journaling is a discipline in its own right. The reading and writing aspect of this research required

[182] Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning About Auto Ethnography," 3.
[183] Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning About Auto Ethnography," 9.

setting time aside each day, as well as actively engaging with these components in self-dialogue and self-reflection.

The process was cyclical in that often I found myself circling around to similar experiences repeatedly, yet in each instance there was some difference. The continual rediscovery of habits evolved and the process moved in helictical cycles. There were things I thought I knew at the outset, such as that this might be a source of significant stress, which I kept having to come to grips with repeatedly. Nevertheless, the process moved forward and revealed new ways for me to understand what I thought I could take for granted.

Unexpected experiences emerged. The emersion stage, which I thought would be a stable period of intense contemplation of the question throughout my lived experience, turned out to be a crescendo of intensity. The eight limbs of Yoga represent the broad complexity of human experience. The whole organism in all its physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions is represented in the different limbs of practice. This is why it is such a powerful tool in establishing the practice of presence. Each instance of experience is an opportunity to cultivate awareness of the here and now, whether that is attention to the kindness in the intention of our words, or the honesty they may or may not relate in their extension. Our words, our posture, our breath, the food we eat, the thoughts we think are all opportunities to realize more or less presence in awareness. This practice off the mat, which is yoga in the world, is essentially the struggle to engage emersion in presence.

This turned out to be very difficult. I knew there would be breakdowns in the practice over the course of my study yet how I managed these inevitable bumps revealed many

lessons I had not expected. As I had anticipated from the outset, expectations were continually challenging. Realizing one has lost focus only when one wakes from a distraction happens hundreds of times a day. I could laugh away these realizations as tiny reminders to stay focused. When a deeper desire for specific results looms large in the background, this can mean something very different. Linking the practice of presence to the experience of the Holy set the stakes very high in my heart and mind. The very hinderances I sought to overcome, attraction and aversion, were in essence built right into my question.

The order of the Stages in Moustakas' heuristic research model are clear. I expected them to proceed in sequence organically, yet the experiences that formed the body of the creative synthesis represented a cathartic climax in the immersion stage. I had expected a gradual saturation of the question with accumulated data. What I encountered was more of a tsunami that washed over this project. In the aftermath, I retreated into an incubation stage rather unconsciously. I was exhausted and overwhelmed, and simply tried to focus on things other than the thesis project. It worked, whether I planned it to or not. Connections started bubbling up to the surface from different dimensions of the practice I had engaged in over the many months of the research practice. I did not even realize when the incubation process began. I could not see it from the inside out.

It was only in light of the illumination stage that I even recognized I had been experiencing an incubation stage at all. When I began reading again to elucidate the background in Yoga philosophy, synapses started firing and connections appeared between dreams, physical practice, and the theologies I had been studying. In a way, it felt more like I was in the process, rather than employing the process. This was perhaps

the greatest challenge of this mixed methodology. I had to let it take its course, pleasant or unpleasant, for good or otherwise.

In some ways, the breakdowns in the system I had were an unrecognized boon. When one practices routines for long periods of time, these routines may become stale and habitual rather than challenging. My practice over the course of this study saw times when different elements stumbled and faltered. Yet it was in these moments when I was able to recognize contrast in my experiences. When I struggled in meditation or found my physical practice lacking vigor or focus, it emerged in the journaling. The observation of such moments alongside the everyday challenges recorded in the journal helped connect experiences that did not at first seem connected.

The expectations I unconsciously imported into this project and the fears they carried in attendance were revealed most vividly when I felt myself falling short in one way or another in this complex of practices. The contrasts in experience between when I felt at my best and when I judged myself at my worst were some of the most instructive signposts to the meaning and possibility of presence in everyday life as well as in carefully designed programs.

I could see when my patience was short in the journals. In reading and dialoging with the entries, I found many misapprehensions which were only born out through time and keeping records. I could see the quality of my handwriting change when I was strong and confident, and when I was uncertain or afraid. There were even what I recognized as micro-incubation periods, when gaps appeared in the journal record indicating where my self-observation dropped off. Invariably, these small breaks brought with them changed perspectives when I re-emerged. The whole process was flawed, and from each moment

of recognizing this came insights into the process of seeking continuity of presence in the world with the possibility of the Holy in mind.

Chapter Four

Creative Synthesis: The Workshop

I was at our family cottage by the lake when the message came to my inbox. My first thought was that someone had died and I was being notified. It was from the church minister of one of the several congregations I had attended over the years. The first thing I felt was apprehension. What had happened? I had not had any recent contact with the community.

When I opened the message, I was surprised to learn that there was a conference being mounted by the church for spiritual seekers from all over. The theme was exploring how to be more fully human, and the minister was asking me if I would be willing to offer leadership in a couple of workshops. Breath and body was the topic. I felt flattered. I knew right away that I had to do this.

I was at a juncture halfway through the time allotted for a thesis project, and despite mountains of resources, I was feeling like I was in the wind as to what it all meant. What did they expect of this workshop? Who would attend? It sounded as if they were looking for some introductory Yoga practice, which was easy, I thought. In the back of my mind, I knew how I felt when I took on new things, even old things in a new way. In the past, I had led regular practices twice a week at a fitness club in town and subbed here and there as well. I knew even when on home turf with a clear plan that I would be nervous. I had roofed houses for eighteen years and had been nervous starting every single season. I knew that I had to do this.

The message requested that I get back to them with a response as quickly as possible. The conference was in a month. If I had any questions, I could call the minister. First, I

checked out the website. There were eight or ten different workshops for people to choose from as well as presenting speakers with discussion groups in between. One video presentation was from the author of several books I had read, an author whose spiritual journey had led them to become estranged from their church tradition. Another presenter was both an author and a controversial figure in the church for holding definitions of God that were heretical to some and, from their own characterization, atheist. How did I fit into this?

My practice began as a mere exercise routine but had evolved into a spiritual discipline. Leading Yoga in a secular setting had been a good experience, but the spiritual part was discouraged by the facilities in which I had led classes. The company did not want any chanting. No "Oms" were permitted lest they offend some particular religious practice. It was to be a fitness class where anything of more subtle significance must be veiled in secular language and divorced from the explicit traditions of mythology and metaphysics that gave the practice context. It could be done well with delicacy, but it did not feel free of censure. These workshops would be different. I would be in a church environment. People would expect spiritual connections to be explored—or would they? Who would the participants be? Probably not flag-bearers of conservatism, if the program was any indication, but there would be people from all over the country.

I messaged the minister. "Yes," I said, "I would be excited to contribute leadership in the two workshops." I explained I would call her when I returned to town in a couple of days and touch base on the details. My mind had already started to churn as to how I would break down the time. A seventy-five minute practice was not long, and I would want some time to actually discuss the principles of pranayama and asana as spiritual

technologies. I am usually hard-pressed to wrap up an asana practice in an hour, and here we would want a significant amount of time for pranayama or breath work. I would have to pick and choose techniques to cover what I wanted to in the time allotted. I could do this well. I knew I could. I had a month to consider the possibilities. I had a month to anticipate and plan. I felt safe at that distance in time and in the space of the cottage in the forest far from town.

From the conversation with the minister, everything shifted. We had played phone tag for a couple days once I returned to town, but one morning she woke me up with a phone call that connected. The conversation was brief; I was a little groggy. The numbers of those attending the workshop would emerge as people registered. The space was yet to be determined. I probed for expectations she might have, but it all came back to the same description: exploring ways to be more human, breath and body; in short, some variation of Yoga practice. The only thing I gleaned for sure was that it would be an older crowd.

There was no peg to hang my plans on. How could I plan for this? I had learned long ago that whenever I tried to make a practice work within a program, it never did. Plans were for the sake of my own mental health rather than necessarily suited to the needs of people I had never met. I had to reconcile myself to not knowing the background or abilities of those who would attend. I knew what I *could* do but had no idea what I *would* do. Just as with my thesis project, I found myself hanging in the wind. Years of practice and preparation could not render either the thesis or the workshop into something certain or predictable. "If you knew what you were doing, it would not be research." I reminded myself of these words of Albert Einstein when I felt apprehensive about writing. Could I say something similar about the workshop? It was a small thing in comparison, but these

short sessions were explorations; we would all have to try and see. However, from that very first conversation with the minister, some seed of doubt sprouted. This was not a new seed, but one which had been buried long before I ever received the first E-mail.

This month of anticipation came at an odd time for me. It was a time when I had run the course of setting up the formalities of a thesis. The reading was done, the method described, and the practice had been ongoing for some months and recorded in its highs and lows in my journal. I had come to a feeling of impasse. Taking a formal Yoga practice back to church seemed uncertain, to say the least. I realized that both how I practiced Yoga and how I lived the faith of my upbringing had become very interior experiences. They lived alongside each other and were in many ways interwoven to my understanding, but this was not something I described to others. The only tangible evidence was how I lived day to day and what I wrote in my journal. I had the sense of looming exposure.

When all else seems uncertain, it always feels good to have a routine. Yet in that month, the routine was difficult. I was in a stage where the most effective practice for me was off the mat; that is, my attention was resolved on being present to the experiences of everyday life. I concentrated on identifying my feelings and reactions to events and people; I focused on finding a place detached from the turmoil of uncertainty I felt, and grounded in each minute event. The traditional practices of posture and breath, which normally are the foundation for practice off the mat, became increasingly difficult. Whenever I practiced *asana,* I found myself disappearing into planning a sequence for the workshop. Underneath my breath work were thoughts of whether the technique would be appropriate for beginners. In some ways, it was easier not to practice as I found

it easier to focus on anything but the routine of method and still cultivate presence. It was as if presence and distraction were turned inside out.

My journals from this time describe a feeling of paralysis. I felt caught somehow in the uncertainty of everything I aimed towards. It felt easier to just go to work and immerse myself in whatever was immediate. I was not just struggling with dispersion of attention, I felt longing for distraction. I craved sleep not from fatigue, but for escape into dreams or oblivion. I would wake long before I should get up thinking about the thesis or the workshop. My mind churned about in imagination for what seemed like long periods in the night before I wrestled my awareness away or succumbed to blissful sleep again. When I did get up, I felt guilt for any time not spent either in writing, reading, or in formal yoga practice. I had felt anxious before, but not like this.

I chose not to call it anxiety. It did not need to be labelled; rather, I considered it just the feeling I had and that it would pass. This approach changed the story I created behind the feeling and allowed me to move on in my mind. It worked, but maintaining this approach was an ongoing challenge. Ironically, I would describe it as distracting myself from distraction by focusing on something neutral and present to me. It came to feel like distraction framed the focus of everything I felt and did. I felt as though I was fleeing from the present sensation into another present sensation. It was like I was living through a television and continually changing the channel to avoid what seemed unpleasant with each switch. I found I was trying to lose myself in mundane things.

One of the few things that seemed to help at that time was walking in the forest near my home, where I could be immersed in the autumn colours. When I awoke feeling too wound up and anxious to write or read, I would go for a walk and simply focus on the

ebb and flow of my breath, the aromas of the plants, the sound of the stirring breeze and tiny creatures, the warmth of the sun on my skin. I discovered again and again a taste of how gratitude and presence can transform a stormy heart and mind. But I also was reminded again and again that this did not absolve me of the return to my turmoil. That, I carried with me from place to place where it might bubble over at any time if I did not displace it with some other object of awareness. At the worst of times, there was a strange voice that lashed out in my mind, as it had before at moments of vulnerability throughout my life, and would scream: "Kill me! I don't want to live this way anymore!" Yet, I know that feelings change; even deep grief softens with time. I was just scared, and relief was only a breath away. It did not have to be all or nothing, yet somehow it seemed as if that was what I was struggling with.

Less than two weeks before the event, I dreamed I was there and the workshop was happening. *In the dream there were two people who started acting up in the middle of the workshop like bratty kids in school. They grew increasingly disruptive until the scene changed to a deserted beach in Hawaii. I have never been to Hawaii. It was impossibly beautiful. I fell down and wept.*

The previous evening while at work, we got a message from management that there would be public forums organized by the government revisiting the issue of harm reduction and, specifically, safe injection sites in the inner city. It has always been controversial in every neighborhood where they have been proposed, but our organization has stood by the evidence that says it saves lives. My coworker wanted to go. Our supervisor encouraged us to go, but warned us it might be a volatile situation. Past meetings had been cut short due to anger and abuse of the committee members. We were

warned not to wear our work uniforms, and to park our decaled vehicle some distance from the event. We were also advised not to identify ourselves as employees of the organization, should we choose to speak. I did not want to go. I knew explicitly that I was not fond of crowds, let alone mobs of angry people. Strangely, without a plan or a thought, I found myself at the microphone addressing the panel and a room full of people. I felt calm and clear as I described the necessity of survival as a precondition for any recovery from addiction, and that survival should not be a function of socioeconomic status in any just society. It was like I was not even there. Afterward several people approached with appreciation for what I had expressed. I had been so scared to go to this forum and have always hated public speaking, yet no one knew that. My fear had been casting an illusion over my ability. Against all my instincts, my will had flowed with the current of the moment, and I found the right path and the proper steps. My fear was irrelevant, but I still felt it.

My nights were increasingly visited by disturbing images, yet strangely, they seemed detached from me. *I dreamed of being on a rocky beach where a Leviathan loomed overhead. It had tentacles like a squid, and it filled the sky with such vastness that I could not comprehend its totality. We fled inland, through forests and plains, hiding in the snow, growing hungry and losing weight. I joined a group of refugees, and we were armed with sticks to make our way back to the beach. I taught them how to wield their sticks to defend themselves. On the beach, we threw away our sticks and exchanged them for fishing rods of which there were hundreds and hundreds stored in a shed. We waded into the surf towards a resort down the beach where great earth movers were bulldozing their way through town. I was in school. My binder full of sheet music spilled out onto*

the floor. I was missing class. I let the pages go. The zipper on my backpack was open and it would not hold anything. I dropped the pack and my blanket. I let all these things go.

A week before the workshop, I had been trying to seek refuge in Samkhya Philosophy. I needed to be clear in my understandings of this branch of Indian philosophy for my thesis. Everyone refers to it in the commentaries on Yoga. I needed to study it firsthand. I was already familiar with the basics, but only through hearsay. It takes work to read. It made me focus sentence by sentence to be certain I understood. The temptation was to drift off into the day to come, or feel panic that this was irrelevant to my immediate needs for the workshop, or any number of other digressions and distractions. I forced myself to concentrate on the words, which described what I thought I already knew in order to be certain of something, anything these days. There on the couch, trying to focus yet hiding in ideas that served as the lesser of several perceived evils, something fell into place.

As I read these opaque metaphysics that I thought I already knew, a dream jumped out of my memory from when I was very young. It was a recurring dream, which I had experienced in fevers from my early childhood, perhaps elementary school. The dream had at least two forms, but they were identical in meaning to me. *In the dream, there was an endless line extended through an unfathomable expanse, like the sky, only without feature. Suspended from the line was its own anchor, which could only be described as illusive in form like the swirling lights of a migraine aura or an amorphous piece of gristle. I reached out, though I was without body, and very gently touched the line. It snapped and the endless line was gone. The expanse imploded, and all the formless*

universe fell with an impossible roaring in my ears like time had been compressed into a space too tight to hold it. All was lost.

I had been reading about the separation of spirit and nature. There is a paradox in the system in that in human life, spirit is plurality like a soul, yet it is defined as being without attributes or qualities.[184] What is the meaning of multiplicity if discrete units are indistinguishable? Only nature is distinguished by variation of attributes. In the beginning of this system, all potential variation rests in balance as a homogenous mirror image of spirit. Once disrupted, the endless permutations of nature ripple through the cosmos and disrupt the perception of the spirit's reflection. It is a highly abstract description akin to what, in some Christian theological terms, might be called a fall from grace.

A second form of the same childhood dream went farther into the nature side of this equation. *In this dream, there was a tiny yellow flower, like a dandelion, growing in green grass along the low green bars that mark the school yard of my junior high school. I was embodied in this dream and I reached out very tentatively. There was a ringing silence, like a single tone, which resonated through everything, and as I picked the flower, there was an awful cacophonous roar like being under an avalanche or the violence of a tornado. Everything was crushed under an infinite weight and ground into blackness with what seemed to be the churning of chains and cogs in greasy black mud.*

The most striking feature of both these dream variations was the feeling that attended the dreams. An unfathomable contrast between suspension and collapse was overwhelming. It was an experience of what felt like ultimate doom crashing down on a

[184] Swami Virupakshananda trans., Samkhya Karika of Ishvara Krsna with The Tattva Kaumudi of Sri Vacaspati Misra (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press,1995).

lovely summer day. It felt like a smoking gun in the hand while the loved one lies before me destroyed. Time turned in on itself, and what was extended became compressed into the instant. It was perhaps the awful moment where potentiality and actuality met.

The third form of this dream was shielded behind reason and occurred when I was fresh out of university. All there was to this form, aside from the attendant familiar feeling, were the words stamped in my mind upon waking: "*Remember the entelechy*." I did not know the meaning of this strange word upon waking, but looked it up and discovered that it was from Aristotle's Metaphysics, which I had been studying over the previous year in undergrad. The entelechy is the point where potentiality and actuality meet.[185] It was an obscure word that I had no memory of encountering before. Now it seemed like the flower, poised without effort, seeded there, waiting to be picked.

Presence most often feels like a fleeting glimpse to me, but sometimes it may be inhabited like being embodied in a dream. At this stage of my life, it inevitably slips away into distraction or forgetfulness only to be rediscovered again and again with much work However, sometimes presence appears unexpectedly like the boon of a chance meeting with an old friend. I pushed the dream from childhood to the margins, as I had so many times before, and filed away the connection to Samkhya. I had other things upon which to focus. Perhaps when I was free, I would revisit this sense of connection.

I continued to feel uneasy and tried to understand it as *abhinivesha*, fear of change or attachment to the status quo. This seemed simple and natural. I tried to reassure myself that I could do this workshop and that my discomfort was not specifically related to it, but rather, simply to change in general. My doubt in myself was irrational. I felt it

[185] Aristotle, The Basic Works of Aristotle. Ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House,1941).

nevertheless. Just under the surface, when I was not occupied with something immediate, I felt like I wanted to hide. I longed to remain asleep and not wake. I had a strong aversion to the way I felt underneath the mechanics of living. I did not want to feel this way anymore. Waking was distinctly unpleasant. I felt frozen when I was awake, like a deer in headlights.

My thesis project centred on the practice of presence. I increasingly had the sinking feeling that I had been projecting expectation, or perhaps hope, onto my idea of presence. I somehow thought subliminally that presence would bring peace and release. I wished for this, but it was not what I found. Presence was the heart of my turmoil, with my fear, at the center of conflict, wherever I was lost and with whatever I had found. There was no way around experience, only through it.

In the last week before the event, the experience of generalized anxiety turned into fully focused fear. I could not sleep, but I did not want to get out of bed. A racing feeling in my heart and mind made time seem condensed; everything was loud and fast even in a quiet empty room. There was a climate strike at the legislature and I felt strongly about this issue, but I was rattled. I felt guilt and remorse for not going. My usual rationalizations were of little help. Ideas and words were meaningless to me, like endless, inexorable perishing platitudes, like waves in the ocean. I wished to the idea of God: “I want simple childish meaning. I want certainty of anything. I want trust. I want comfort.” In this time, I felt only doubt. I doubted the world and I doubted myself. I doubted all my empty ideas of God, and I doubted all my endless machinations of purpose in this world.

I came back to the practice. It was the only thing I could do. It was something upon which to focus. It felt like a tether to shore. A strong sequence of postures with the body that settled into a practice of seated breath work was the beginning. I found a way, incrementally, to bring the wild horses under control. I resolved on one thing, breath, and gradually drew the whole bodily experience of all the tissues involved into the place of my heart. The ebb and flow of respiration washed into and out of the rhythm of my pulse. The sense of centre returned. I prayed. I do not often address Spirit, or God. Words always seem to fall short, so I avoid them in the practice of what I call prayer. Yet, in these last few days and in this time of pervading uncertainty, I reached out for something—something I feared might be within me, witnessing all this. I doubted myself, yet somehow had the sense that this doubt was wise and consistent with what I thought I was trying to do. In this prayer, I began to wonder whether I longed for connection or belonging. I longed for something enduring beneath the changing swirl of events and the coming and going of feelings, people, and ideas. I prayed for courage to go where I needed to go and to stay where I needed to stay.

My being cleared and I slept soundly. Four days before the event, I passed into what felt like the eye of the hurricane. My heart felt released upon waking, and my mind had settled down.

My feeling in morning practice was that I was right where I needed to be. Despite the undercurrent of rehearsal and the subliminal awareness of the shared practice to come, I felt myself inhabiting the moment of my practice. I was not afraid any more. At least I was not afraid in that moment, when I was able to establish presence. On that morning, I formulated the plan for the next phase of the thesis, and laughed at myself for having felt

stalled. There was so much to do that worrying about what came next was absurd. I laughed at having passed through the troubling phase of the last few days and the uncertainty they had revealed. I sensed this was not the end, yet it was an instructive reminder of how hard it is to see out of such spaces from the inside.

Strange notions occurred to me in this time. I found myself asking if I would want to live a life with nothing to fear. I reflected on the various funerals I had attended in the last few years and the formal assurances of heaven that seem to accompany these events of ultimate confrontation. I have never had any interest as an adult in the idea of heaven—at least no positive interest. It always seemed objectionable. At the same time, freedom is alluring to me like no other thought or feeling. Perhaps I needed something from which to be free. Once I have found and experienced what I am free for, then what? I summed up these ruminations in my journals of the time with the words: I am afraid; I love the world.

As I contemplated this link between fear and love, I flashed back to a church youth group in junior high school. We were doing dream work with a facilitator. We were learning to dialogue with our dreams. I was working with one of my fever dreams. I identified something clear and striking from the dream: it was the flower. It was the flower I had picked with such catastrophic consequence. I asked the flower what it wanted. It said: "I want to be free." I flashed forward to the present. I was not free. I was suffering from addiction. I was addicted to ideas. I was addicted to ideas of the Holy.

It was inevitable, but my time in the eye of the storm passed and I found myself awash again, feeling as though I was just holding on before the workshop. It was like my

peace of heart and mind had never happened. In the middle of the night, the day before I was to attend, I struggled in the darkness to focus on my breath, elongating the exhale of each cycle. In the morning, nausea, shakes, and racing thoughts seemed to consume everything. Underneath, somehow, I knew I could do this, yet I seemed to be on the edge of a tailspin. My feelings, these physiological symptoms, were completely out of proportion to what I knew. Why was this happening? I was driven from bed to vomit again and again despite an empty stomach. Somehow the physically convulsive process, however fruitless, left me feeling marginally better.

I retreated into *asana* and *pranayama*, and it helped a little. I thought to myself that my experience was not much of an endorsement of Yoga practice. Does it have to be? What do I have to prove, and to whom? People were coming to the workshop for an experience, but that experience was not up to me, it was up to them. All I could do was show some possible ways, and the journey was up to them. Nevertheless, I felt quite disarmed. I thought that practicing presence would allow me to manage if not overcome fear, but instead, it just had me examining it and wondering where it came from. I recalled the Yoga sutra about *abhinivesha*, the fear of change and death. It says that even the wise may succumb to it. I did not feel very wise at all.

The day came. Friday of the weekend conference dawned. The night before, *I dreamed of fish lying dead and rotted on the shore. A drunk driver had stolen my truck. A martial artist at a tournament challenged me to a fight and I avoided him, making excuses.* These images felt like relief. Consciousness was again full of instability. I awoke to nausea, spinning thoughts and the feeling of fainting. I got busy, that was all I could do, to try to be focused on what was right in front of me. I did not have to do

anything the Friday evening as my workshops were both on the Saturday, but I wanted to go to get a sense of the scene. I went on a reconnaissance mission.

It always feels strange going back to church. Many people my age have moved away or fallen away from attendance, so it is mainly a reunion with folks from the older generation. No, I do not have children. No, I am not married. No, I do not own a house. Yes, I am still working on that same program at school. I asked people how their children were doing. It works nine times out of ten to distract folks, and it was a fairly surefire road to relief from feeling like I was in a glass display case. I should not care, but the older generation had tangible standards for understanding the processes of life and its stages. It made me feel like the kid who never grew up, but my choices were without regret.

I saw a table with someone from the university sitting at it and went to sit down. It was strange—we had only spoken once or twice, but it seemed like the right place to be, among a face I knew who might understand where I was coming from even if only in the academic dimension of my life. We had a good chat, and I was able to describe my progress as well as gather some ideas on my next stages. More than anything, it was a place to be other than the impending near future.

Somehow nothing was as I expected. It was just like a Sunday morning worship service, except there were introductions of the presenters and workshop leaders interspersed with singing and small group discussions to facilitate getting to know one another. I started to relax a little and was able to speak about the things that were barriers to being most fully human in my experience. Strangely, the words just spilled out of my mouth without planning. I knew deeply that to be authentically present and engaged was

to walk through doubt and fear. Judgement, failure, vulnerability are stories we tell ourselves to give substance to the feelings and potentials those fears seem to point to, but at the bottom of all this was an existential uncertainty that simply changed clothes to suit the weather. How could I be there for anyone else if I was not here as myself? It was a strange thing, but around a table of people I only just barely met, I was able to articulate this in a heartfelt sense. I had been wrestling with it for weeks. It seemed like a distillation of my lifetime, yet it was not truly real until I spoke the words and someone else listened. They listened and even seemed to understand. Something started to ease up in my chest just a bit, but there was more to come.

At dinner, I sat with a couple of the younger folks in the crowd. It turned out one of them was also leading workshops the next day. We traded descriptions of our respective workshop topics, and it emerged that neither of us knew how it was all going to go the next day. I was trying to describe how Yoga did not require any particular religious background, though it emerged through a cultural framework of Hinduism. One of those at my table was a teacher in the Catholic school system, and he described how they had to call what would normally be called Yoga "Christian stretching" so as not upset some of the parents. I thought maybe my interest in these things had carried me away, as the other man seemed a little cool and aloof on the subject.

I ducked out early that evening; there would be a video presentation, and I had already read all the presenter's books. I felt a palpable release when I walked out the door. I have lived quite a solitary life for some time, and though I work with the public, I typically engage briefly, with intensity, and then disengage. I am a crisis worker, and when I am with someone in crisis, I am totally focused on the matter at hand. Crowds are

rarely part of the equation and never for extended periods of time. I found I had to ground myself in my breath previously just sitting at the table to avoid feeling closed in. The cool evening air and the walk to the car and the silence and the release of just a little of my nervous energy all together felt like heaven.

That night I dreamed of trains. *Someone called out in alarm. They had derailed and were grinding and careening through the rail yard with awful force and the shriek of twisted metal.* I could not have coffee the next morning when I woke. I could not eat. I felt like I had jumped into an icy lake. When I arrived at the church, I busied myself with setting up the space. I set out mats and some resource materials for folks who were interested in reading about the practice. I discovered that there was no audio input on the portable stereo I had borrowed from my parents. It was a stereo from out of time and place. One of the event facilitators suggested someone who I might ask about a replacement sound system, but I would have to find them. It was a nice big quiet room.

The morning program followed a scheduled light breakfast, and I struggled over the course of the couple hours to eat a bran muffin with very small bites. It felt like my whole being had to be resolved on even cycles of respiration and the careful movement of my hands, the posture of my body, the expression on my face. I was like a small animal trying not to be seen by predators or a fugitive avoiding being picked out of the crowd. Singing was the hardest part. Church always makes me want to cry, especially the singing. I used to sing on stage in pubs and in theatrical productions as well as in various choirs, but when I sing certain songs in church, my heart aches and my throat constricts and my eyes well and it takes everything I have not to start crying. I sometimes wonder

why here in church, of all places, I feel like I must not break down. Instead, my voice falters and I fall silent until I regain composure.

The song ended. There was a break before the first workshop. I saw the man I needed to speak to about a music player, and he was immediate in his assistance. I made my way across the yard to the building where the practice was to be held and felt suspended somehow. I felt like a comma in a sentence or a rest in music. I could not get the machine to work and was ready to forget music when the first people arrived for the workshop. The first person was a man I had been seated with at the table the night before. He helped me figure out how to get the music to work. People filtered in; I felt at ease with purpose. I asked people whether they had ever practiced before, whether they had any injuries or blood pressure issues. They were friendly practical questions to get people speaking and help them relax.

I discovered right away that this group was diverse with challenges. Folks were not dressed for movement, so I advised them to tuck in shirts and reassured them this would be gentle and they had nothing to worry about. Some people were so worried about their feet that they would not take off their socks. One person said he had a hard time sitting down, but then was okay once seated. Several people needed significant props to sit comfortably on the floor. One participant spoke very little English, while another was hard of hearing. Of course, there was one in the group who had practiced yoga a lot and was raring to go.

During the time of the workshop, I was completely comfortable being involved in others' comfort, which was quite challenging. The people in the workshop seemed nervous, and so we talked for a bit about connections between posture and our psyche,

how the way we feel affects how we carry our body, and how our body in turn affects the way we feel. Except for the one yoga veteran, people seemed not to know what to expect. Sitting on the mats was hard for most, so I got them to lie down and began to explore with them breath in the belly and breath in the chest. Observing their breath without effort was contrasted with observing breath that was modulated and controlled. This was rather brief as I wanted to get people moving as well. I was following a formula I used in my own personal practice that begins with grounding in breath, moves through bodily postures to warm up the whole system, and then settles into concerted breath work before entering a seated meditation process.

At the time, I was so busy engaging with individual issues and encouraging people or offering options that I did not notice with judgement, but it was a circus fiasco. The music did not work because of the hearing impairment. Even then, the challenges of language made direction an issue. I had arranged the participants in a circle, which is unusual for me, but in order to keep with the practice of the church congregations' tradition. This meant that my practice of mirroring the group in demonstration would be visually opposite from those beside me. There were a couple of individuals who had very limited body awareness. Some people struggled with left-right distinctions, some had to see what I was doing, and others had to hear an explanation in order to make their bodies inhabit a posture. For at least one person, it was difficult to move from standing to kneeling to sitting in any but a lengthy process of transitions. With the exception of the one veteran yoga practitioner, every single participant required a particular type of attention. I was very busy.

What brought the whole craft to a safe landing was the last component. I dropped the idea of seated breath work because few could sit comfortably on the mat, so we engaged a guided body and breath meditation lying on our backs, as my first Yoga instructor had done. We went on a journey following breath visualized in the tissues of the body starting from the tips of the toes and gradually moving step by step all the way up to face and the head. It sometimes puts people to sleep, but at best it can create an aware relaxation of a very different order than normal waking.

The ordeal seemed to help me more than it helped them. It was the most challenging and diverse bunch I have ever encountered in leading a small group. It was the first of two sessions, and despite my recognition that almost nothing had worked to plan or to my imaginary satisfaction, we had come in for a safe landing. It was a bumpy ride, but we were all still alive.

It was lunchtime, and an interesting sensation followed for me. I recall the feeling of relief, but I was still pretty wound up. I made friendly conversation in the food line, then spilled soup on my sleeve and made a detour to clean up. On my way, I ran into the mother of someone I went to school with. Her child and I used to be childhood friends who would play together. She told me she was coming to my workshop. I was perplexed. Some years ago, upon hearing I was into Yoga, she told me that she had tried to get into it, but that it just was not her thing. I pushed it from my mind. The last thing I needed was a skeptic in the group.

The afternoon speaker that day was quite good. They were very charismatic. At one point rather early on, they asked everyone to stand up and embody the most open postural expression they could, followed by the one that was most closed. I opened my arms wide

to the sky, head back, and then curled into a ball on the ground. In my workshop, I had brought a couple of cartoon representations of embodiment and comfort or discomfort for people in order to lightly illustrate this same notion. In one, Charlie Brown hangs his head, describing how important it was to maintain his depressed stance, because if he drew his shoulders back and raised his head high, he would feel better, and this would wreck his perfectly good foul, depressed mood. I realized that I was making my workshop more complicated than it needed to be. My workshop could have been expanded from this simple exercise that had been employed by the afternoon presenter, to then be illustrated by Charlie Brown, or rather Charles M. Schultz, in my resource materials.

I threw the original plan out the window, with the exception of the one part I had not used in the first workshop. This time, I had chairs for everyone. The most important thing in breath work is being comfortable in a stable posture, and most everyone can sit in a chair regardless of physical challenges. When the group was all there, I turned it over to them, but this time I went around the circle and asked what they had hoped to learn or practice with regard to the breath or body. The first thing that came up was how to manage anxiety. It was perfect.

We all laughed about the Charlie Brown comic and had all experienced the basic exercise in the session before of assuming open versus closed postures, and how that had made us feel. This time, however, we worked a variation of the same exercise with just breath. We began by establishing a baseline, watching our natural breath without trying to change it. We practiced experimenting with the contrast between abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing versus chest breathing, and then full yogic breathing.

In between each exercise, we would open our eyes to return to the group and share experiences or field questions. We navigated from balanced inhalation and exhalation to extended exhalation and through a whole variety of basic pranayama exercises. Each one led to different resolutions of awareness on the whole bodily activity of breathing.

The awareness of the components of breath and the discipline of these components is the ground work for meditation. As we expand or contract our awareness from components to the whole process back to particular components, we engage the first inklings of one-pointed awareness. In Yoga terminology, this is called *ekagrata*.

We only left our chairs for the last twenty minutes of the workshop and brought our breath awareness into the most basic sequence of postures, exploring the origin from the Charlie Brown comic and expanding it to a half a dozen postural variations that engaged the whole body in ways that challenged or facilitated different phases of breathing. Once everyone was warm with motion, we brought it back down to the ground with the guided breath tour of the whole body as we had done in the morning session. Everyone left relaxed and calm with a smile. The one who had said Yoga was not their thing stayed to talk afterward. They were surprised to discover that I had understood them to be a skeptic and explained that the Yoga they had been referring to those years before had been some strange novelty variation from California where everyone chugged beer in between postures! We mused about how we get impressions of what others think, when really, it is simply what we think they think. We laughed.

It was dinnertime, and I went to get food. I met the other young workshop leader. He seemed cheerful and relaxed. He asked how it went and I told him. I told him that the first workshop had been totally different than the second. I explained that my plan

had gone right out the window but that it had worked out well in the balance. He shared a similar account in that the group had differing expectations than him and that the first version evolved into a stronger second version. We exchanged a high five.

I sat down at a table with the presenter from the morning session. We had a rambling conversation about justice, politics, health care, and all manner of things. They spoke about conflict within the church, holding controversial views, and the struggle for such views to be heard and accepted by more conservative elements. It occurred to me that this circled around what was perhaps one of my greatest fears. Exile from the fold is something deeply anathema to survival in some sense. Even if in this day and age nobody is tortured or burned for heresy, on some level, I still feel dread at the prospect of having my most inner visions and intuitions of faith dragged into the light, judged and possibly condemned. Yet, standing our ground, we may find that ground is joined by others in support. Conflict does not always end poorly. Somehow this was hard for me to confront directly as we chatted, yet it was staring me right in the face.

My spiritual practice has moved far afield from convention, at least from traditional conventions of Christendom. It is open to any and all visions that resonate with an open heart and an open mind. In fact, as I contemplate it, I realize that I had known for a long time without giving it a lot of direct attention that many of my views and practices were, from any stand point, heretical. We must choose definitively or we are not engaged in the struggle to evolve ourselves into greater Self. The very crisis of faith requires a choice, and no institution or set of procedures or map of the territory can provide any more than a simulation of terrain that must be explored firsthand and experienced for oneself. Ultimately, it lies in how we relate.

Whether it is excavating for spirit in the inner catacombs of nature's heart and mind or struggling for justice in the social world, our relational nature is unavoidable. We are simultaneously divided from each other and divided in our inner experience, yet this is the condition that calls us together both in the turmoil of the interior landscape and the sea of disparity in our social exchanges. This condition cannot be avoided. I have tried, and no matter how hard one works to isolate oneself in one domain, the truth finds expression somehow in another. Solitude is a chimera. I have been trying to relate two aspects of a single principal. The Holy has often been described as the experience of the wholly other, and yet the wholly other as the ontological root of each experiencing being somehow sublimates our distinction and discreteness into the revelation that there are no others.

Chapter Five

Illuminations in the Aftermath

The physical dimension of practicing Yoga has peaks and valleys. Over the course of weeks and months, it changes. Part of the challenge of striving for presence through asana is balancing the discipline to motivate my efforts with acceptance of where I happen to be at any given stage in the practice. Today is not like yesterday, and as much as I would like to continually improve, there are set backs and detours. There are even times when the discipline fails for a time. Trying for consistency is only realistic from within the recognition that it is not absolute. There is a limited context for steadiness and ease within a changing, aging body. Resolving one's attention toward the Holy is similar. There are periods of doubt and absence. There have been stages in life into which and out of which I have grown in my vision and receptivity. There are times when my attention became fixated on ideal notions at the expense of experiential recognition of what was immediately present. My ideal notions of myself are related to my attachments to the notion of the Holy as an absolute, in that they both serve as objectives and barriers.

When I began the formal timespan of this project, I concentrated my energies on the practice and the observation of the practice, and this required making choices. I decided that I would forgo practicing martial arts for a time because I wanted to isolate the qualities of my physical practices in life to the subject matter at hand. I wanted to narrow the field of my research experience of presence with reference to the Holy to something manageable. I also coincidentally had nagging injuries from the practice of martial arts that had come to make me feel that my time in that pursuit might be at an end. By mid-

life, in such endeavours, people acquire aches and pains that just never go away, and I chose not to add to any possibility of future disability.

I chose to focus on Yoga and work around my hip, which would give out, and my neck injury, which turned my left hand numb when I looked over my shoulder. I gained these injuries training to fight, and it made sense to discontinue that activity to allow them to improve. I felt some resentment toward the practice of martial arts for this, even though I also felt proud of the advanced level I had achieved. In some ways, I blamed one of the instructors I had worked with for a dangerous exercise that led to the neck problem. I decided to move on, but with some ambivalence.

My Yoga practice had also seen some setbacks. My new job made it so that I had to give up teaching asana as well as martial arts. I used to lead classes each week and try to attend other formal asana practices as well, in order to continue learning and being challenged. With a timetable that had me free only in the afternoons, my practice had to be solitary. I focused on gently trying to regain my range of movement in my hip and trying to protect my injured neck as well as possible. There were innumerable modifications and choices in asana, so I thought this would be as good an approach to practicing physical presence as any. I gently explored the locations of injury and tried to extend my range of inhibited motion while strengthening the surrounding tissues and supporting the tender spots.

This strategy worked for the most part. Taking great care, I slowly managed to restore the range of motion in my hip, and the discomfort decreased. It still gave out at odd times, but only at very specific points of transition between postures. I resigned myself to having to live with my injured neck. I thought about seeing a chiropractor but

had never been to one, and felt on some level that a spinal injury was not appropriately addressed by manipulation of the injury site. I had lived with this pain for several years, and it had become the baseline of my physical experience. I was used to it.

This was the context for my physical practice of Yoga; care and attention to my body in the context of its challenges and limitations. I found that when my practice was the strongest and the most consistent that I was also at my best off the mat. My patience was most extended. My emotional dynamic was the most stable. I simply felt more able to appreciate blessings and to avoid becoming entangled in unnecessary turmoil or drama. Following my journals, there was a clear connection between when my practice was active and at its strongest, and when I was at my most socially and emotionally flourishing state. There were times when my practice was interrupted, and invariably these times were attended by malaise in physical, emotional, and social dimensions of life. This made sense to me. It seemed like the kind of finding I expected to make in this project. The healthier my body and the greater awareness I had in this one dimension, the more refined my awareness would be in other dimensions of experience. The theory is that they are all connected. This made sense. Living with reference to God requires presence and discipline at each moment in the world, and my body is the point of interface between my finite being and the possibility of its greater connection. When I am not striving for this connection, I fall into either limited identification with the mundane or dissociate with it entirely and become lost in the labyrinth of my mind and its gerbil wheel processes.

Awareness is tricky. The scope of vision can come to encompass what we recognize as reality. Changes in resolution, however, may expand and contract to either refine

awareness or soften its edges. If the focus never changes, the field becomes mistaken for the totality, and what lies beyond the domain of our vision may be neglected. In a vision where the Holy resides in ubiquitous abundance, this means that there is a vast field of unrecognized opportunity for revelation wherever I choose a fixed position and hold fast to a reified idea.

My first inkling of having slipped into this trap was when I went to the dentist. With my new job came benefits. I was so used to being self-employed that I had gotten out of the habit of availing myself of health care. I had not been to the dentist in a half a dozen years and did not have a family doctor. When I finally decided that it was crazy not to use the free dental plan, I found exactly what I expected and more. Just like the last time I had been to the dentist six years before, they said my teeth were fine. No cavities, healthy gums, the expected outcomes of good hygiene. The dentist did, however, express concern about the enamel. There were two dentists there, and they explained how I was grinding my teeth ferociously to the extent that I was wearing the surface away where it met top and bottom. This grinding of teeth was not an emergency, but it was a revelation. I could not help but wonder how I could spend so much time and energy cultivating awareness of body and posture and breath and language and thought and feeling, yet miss the ongoing fact that my jaw was clenched, and probably had been for years. I resolved myself to the awareness of the muscles of my face, but I also knew that this would be illusive, like trying to recognize when one is falling asleep. I might catch myself clenching my jaw most of the time, but inevitably I had to resign myself to the fact that there was a fundamental dimension of my physical disposition and behavior that was unconscious.

While I was awake, I was able to bring my awareness to my face repeatedly, and I found that I did not catch myself clenching my jaw as much as I expected. I moved on with my practice and my project with the new challenge of physical awareness in the disposition of my face. I noticed that the more focused I became on relaxing my jaw, the more I surprised myself with the discovery of tension around my eyes. This whole situation began to crack open a nut that had been squirreled away for years.

Following the workshop at the church, I felt exhausted. I needed to take a step back and do other things. This was where I identified the beginning of the incubation stage in Moustakas heuristic method. In the summer, I had found a general practitioner and went for the first complete physical exam I had undergone in years, probably since I was a child. It was an interesting experience, sharing my lifestyle choices good and bad with someone else, and it was rather uncomfortable undergoing all manners of testing. It seemed like this was the season for being exposed to others. I asked the doctor what would be the best approach to my injuries: seeking chiropractic treatment, massage therapy, acupuncture, or physiotherapy. The doctor suggested a physiotherapist would be the best to direct my approach. All of these services were covered by my benefit plan, so an appraisal of my condition could lead me in any number of directions. I was happy to have something new and fresh to experience and to step to one side from the months of yoga and reflection, even in some small way.

The physiotherapist was good. I described my problems and he suggested choosing which one was the most pressing. We would approach this one issue at a time. In the first visit, we explored my hip injury. I was convinced that it was healed and that the collapse was simply the result of a pinched nerve. We tested range and strength in a

variety of positions and to my surprise, discovered that there were areas of motion where my leg was completely without strength. Further, there were certain ranges of normal motion that the hip simply would not articulate despite all the careful work I had undergone in my Yoga practice. I had a torn gluteus medius. It had been that way for more than a year, and I had just worked around it as best I could. On the one hand, it felt good to know what was going on and to have a rehabilitation program. On the other, it was unsettling to realize that I had not been as aware of my physical state as I had thought or hoped I would be.

On the second visit, we delved into the neck injury. I assumed it was an injury to the third or fourth cervical vertebrae, as my symptoms were activation of the brachial nerve, which runs down the arm to the hand. I had limited ability to look left and chronic numbness in the first three digits. My assumption was incorrect. After a series of diagnostic exercises, the therapist determined that I had a torn rotator cuff. All the muscles around the shoulder had been clenched to protect it, and this had come to irritate the nerve that ran down my arm. The first thing he suggested was to massage my left pectoral muscle with a firm rubber ball. It was excruciating and strange to explore a muscle which was so tight and so tender, for so long, without my having any awareness of it despite my best efforts at consciousness of my own body. Opening to the new revealed the old as a discovery right under my nose. It hurt, but it felt like healing.

Both injuries were partially healed, but poorly and attended by inhibiting scar tissue. My treatment was to disrupt the scar tissue with needles inserted deep into the muscle and then strengthen the same tissue in appropriate increments and ranges. I had to undo the protective measures of the last few years, retrace my steps, and then move forward on a

new path. It was a strange feeling. I was forbidden to engage my shoulder in particular except in very specific ways. My asana practice would have to totally change for the time being. I was not permanently debilitated as I had feared, and could return to martial arts in time if I so chose. It changed a lot of things for me and raised a lot of questions. How had my practice of protecting myself physically influenced or been influenced by my spiritual practice? How did this translate into the way I perceived and interacted with the world? When I closed myself off to my weaknesses, what else was relegated to the margins of experience?

It became apparent that there were ways that I had shielded myself not only in the cognitive and emotional dimensions of my practice, as I had discovered in the workshop, but also in the most immediate physical dimension as well. I had blamed others for my perceived neck injury, while the real source was not the symptom I experienced, but something else incurred perhaps coincidentally. Thinking back, I began to recognize why I had taken to fighting right hand forward for the last few years. I was protecting my left shoulder. When I later injured my left hip, I was forced to protect the whole left side of my body, and when this proved too much of a challenge, I withdrew from training. I had never really addressed either injury effectively, but instead I adapted in an unbalanced way. This is exactly the opposite of the principles of Hatha Yoga, which means balancing left and right, among other subtler things.

I have always considered myself to be a patient person, someone who takes time to measure the appropriateness of words and deeds, someone who does not take the actions of others personally. This is how I like to think of myself—that is the way I am when I am at my best. I am not always at my best, however, and this emerged in the examination

of my reactions and judgements over an extended period of time. I discovered a strong correlation between my emotional dynamic and the strength of my Yoga practice. There were times when my routine was disrupted, when I let my body lie fallow for some days and I did not have the time to find a baseline of silence in my heart and mind in meditation. What emerged from these periods was alternately anxiousness and resentment. Feeling anxious seemed to be linked to the feeling that I had to continue the requirements of this project, even when on some level, I knew that practices waxed and waned, and sometimes are interrupted for a time. The resentment I experienced was mobile. I found myself projecting my negative feelings outward onto others.

It became a singular struggle in these times to frame and understand what I can only describe as hostility towards different people. There are some people in life who we inevitably find challenging to be around, but for the most part, I am able to avoid becoming attached to negative thoughts and feelings. I feel them, but let them pass without lingering or rehearsing. When my practice is strong and my life feels healthy and abundant this is the case. During my months of journaling, however, I was able to see how much of a difference existed between when I was at my best and when I was not.

There were two people with whom I had equal and consistent interaction over this period. They were very different people and required different communication and energy. I found, in my weak times, ferocious resentment for one or the other. Sometimes I felt I could not say anything as I was bubbling over with negativity. I could breathe through and disarm such moments, but they would often well up again unexpectedly.

The temptation was to assign the source of these feelings to the people themselves. This is the simplest and easiest explanation: it was their fault because they were difficult

people. I knew better than this, however. Feelings are experienced by me and they are up to me to manage. It became a real struggle to disentangle myself from this quagmire. I found myself at home in bed rehearsing my anger and continually coming to the realization that I had lost perspective and been swept away by negative daydreams. This may have something to do with the players, but the key for my understanding was that I found myself transposing these feelings to different people. I found similar dynamics with another person in a different social sphere that produced the same feelings, and I often projected these feelings towards organizations I interacted with, even sometimes towards random people in traffic. It became clear that this anger and resentment was something that I was exercising internally. The external stimulus was not the controlled variable. It appeared to boil down to control.

On the surface, it might seem reasonable that when I was not practicing my regimen, this project would appear to be out of control. Apprehension about not getting things done, dropping the ball, or not being as I would like were all explanations. The project was only symbolic; however, it was something upon which to pin my feelings. When I practiced, I literally exercised strength and discipline surrounding my thoughts and feelings. The distractions from the physical practice must be observed and attended to in a basic series of postures or in time sitting. I have felt this strength atrophy with disuse. Low cycles in my practice led me to feel undisciplined relative to my perceptions of myself based on when I am at my best. The people I found triggered these feelings the most were individuals who struggled with control and different adaptations to feeling vulnerable themselves. Strangely, it was those for whom I ought to give the most support that I found the most challenging to my self-control and self-esteem. What I saw in them

reflected what I least liked in myself at times of weakness. For the longest time, I did not see this explicitly because I was convinced that my feelings were causally connected to the lack of vision represented in others' behavior. My harsh judgment of myself was essentially triggered by the shared nature of our human vulnerability. Yet, instead of practicing compassion and forgiveness for our shared fallible nature, that nature became an enemy and an *other* which I refused to acknowledge in myself and vilified in those around me. They became exiles along with the qualities in myself that they shared and I refused to see.

The real test was that, some days, I got along fine with these individuals. On days where I was grounded and approached the meeting openly with concerted attempts to be supportive and inclusive, all was well, for the most part. Yet on days when I arrived on autopilot—that is, without awareness of my inner dynamic—something else took over. Putting the two individuals with whom I struggled in the same room, even if I did not have to interact with them, was enough to build a fire in my heart that was hard to put out even many hours later. Anger was easier somehow than examining the source of my feelings. Anger felt empowering. It expelled the substance of my suffering outward, except that I could not express these things and still maintain positive relations with these associates. Instead these negative emotions were turned inward , which gave me something to examine and process. I know, however, that even when I was not articulating these feelings my manner made others around me feel uneasy.

It came down to what I rehearsed. When I rehearsed my discipline, that became the dominant feature directing my heart and mind. When I let my unconscious reactions to things go unmonitored I slipped into a rut of reactivity to events and people. Within that

rut, if I exercised my thoughts and feelings, I rehearsed negativity and instinctive protective measures. The more I rehearsed either, the stronger the hold that narrative had on my experience of lived reality. Reality fundamentally changed when I practiced and when I did not. The practice of presence directed toward the experience of the Holy was manifest not only in my explicit hopes and ideas about the Holy and presence, but in my subliminal reactions and ability to perceive and engage in loving relationships. The more tenuous the practice of presence, the less able I was to actualize the social and ethical qualities associated with the Holy, and the less able I was to love others as myself. Put another way, when my awareness faltered, I did not love myself, and I projected this onto others. These illuminations in the aftermath of the workshop shone against the tangible experiences of my physical finitude. This awareness of connection cast a shadow, so to speak, which outlined boundaries I had not recognized before. These boundaries were projected along the margins of my self-acceptance and the acceptance of others; they formed the borderline across which my experience of absence and otherness was cast.

Chapter Six

Explications

The most immediate recognition I encountered in the workshop was the double nature of routine in spiritual practice. On one hand, formula of ritual can give structure and provide regular occasion for focus or reflection, while on the other, if it becomes too comfortable and predictable, it may lull practitioners into a sort of somnambulance.

As a young person in the church, especially in my adolescence, I was always repelled by the call and response format and, especially, unison recitation of prayer. It seemed repellent to my sense of individuality. Somehow, it seemed to take personal authenticity of what might be addressed to the mystery of the Holy and then homogenize it for a group. As a teen, I wanted to put my own stamp on the world.

Part of my process of spiritual discovery has taken off directly from this place of questioning tradition and formula. My process became increasingly interiorized as I stripped away specific observances from my traditional church upbringing and even came to a place where I avoided language in all but the rarest occasions of worship. This is perhaps how Yoga became so attractive as an arena to practice spiritual exploration. Yoga provided a structure that was initially provided externally and aimed at liberation and personal experimentation. Everyone's practice is different and may change with the vicissitudes of living. In Samkhya, discernment of Spirit is known through nature and its laws in the form of pure metaphysical knowledge or gnosis. In Yoga, discernment of Spirit from nature is sought through contemplation and experimentation.[186] In Patanjali's sutras, these two branches are woven together. Atheistic Samkhya is adapted to theism

[186] Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, 15.

and meditational techniques of Yoga to allow for a breadth of different approaches for the spiritual seeker.[187]

Routine may provide a path to follow or a structure of support, but it may just as easily be mistaken for the goal of practice itself. This is problematic and described in the aphorism: Yoga is known through Yoga. It is at the same time acknowledged that the goal may not be seen from the outset, nor described to anyone who has not experienced it. Routine can serve as a discipline or it can become a trap. There was a time when I needed to question every aspect of my church upbringing and venture forth on my own course, yet that navigation in solitude may have itself become a pitfall.

In the periods when I was an active Yoga instructor, I was held to account through relationships in the setting of a group practice. I had to learn and communicate with the others in that setting. Similarly, while active in the church community and while attending classes in theology, there was constant interplay in relation with others. Even if the exchanges in these different domains were incomplete, or abridged, they challenged routine perspectives and practices. My comfort had to be sacrificed for growth in an ongoing way, and so a progressive discipline was forged.

When I began my job as a crisis worker, I was forced to give up my regular teaching times; I had a strange schedule, which made it difficult to practice with others. I had long finished my coursework at the college and was out of the loop with any church congregation. I even dropped my martial arts practice as I was not available to teach or practice at class times. Outside of work, my life and activity became grounded in my thesis project; that is, I lived an insular sphere of routine practicing Yoga, and reading

[187] Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, 7.

and writing. Important work happened this way, especially with respect to my examination of how and why I engage the way I have with family and colleagues and clients. However, some important experiences, which can only be brought about in the context of community, were sacrificed. I became comfortable with a particular range of discomfort. The Yoga workshop I conducted exposed me to these vulnerabilities as new opportunities for exploration.

There is a phrase in the Yoga world. The term "on the mat" designates the formal practice of technique in a specified time and place, perhaps in a community setting. The term "off the mat" refers to how the practice of all eight limbs manifest in our living relation in the world. If the routine of formal practice stops at the edges of the mat, I have always felt that it has fallen short. It is akin, in terms of Christianity, to taking the sacrament of communion directed toward the teleological goal of salvation without any practice of fellowship in the world or sense of the ontological grounding in the union with all of creation. Perhaps in truth it may be fairer to suggest that that formal practice which satays on the mat has not become strong enough to leave the nest, but even the simplest of awakenings to disciplining our hearts and minds in everyday life is a sojourn off the mat. In my work and life, I made the practical, living social practice of Yoga paramount. It was the goal of formal practice. However, in the isolation in which I engineered in this research, almost accidentally I removed much of the context, and so the possibility, for certain explicit social challenges.

My apprehension drew me intuitively to accept the workshop as a project in the first place. I knew that I was isolated artificially on some level, and it was clear from my journaling that there were some very strong aversions to social interaction that I was

nurturing in my practice, whether I realized it or not. For one, I did not talk to anyone about my thesis except my advisor. People would ask, but I would evade. I told myself that it was because it was emerging and not quite formulated yet; rather, it seems to me that I was afraid of being judged. I was uncertain, and somehow that was not acceptable. Reflecting on my inner dialogue from the early part of the workshop, I encountered apprehension of the judgment of "them" in my journaling and have to wonder who "they" were. Was it the church as a particular group of peers from my childhood? Was it the institution of the United Church of Canada? Was it the college I attended? Was it God? Was it my ego?

All of the above represent different forms of "they," and were a "they" whose judgment I feared. Aversion, one of the *kleshas* or obstacles to Yoga practice, had me in its grip. I do not speak about Yoga practice much in circles of church followers because I do not want to make apologies. I did not want to call it Christian stretching. I have been a fly on the wall at faith-based drop-in centres for homeless community members where, in a discussion, one staff member branded the ideas of another staff member as heresy, and then the utterer of the words hung their head and was silenced. It seems unbelievable that this still occurs in the twenty-first century, but it happens. Somehow, I had taken for granted the actual existence of a post-modern pluralistic notion of truth, ignoring what such ideals had grown out of. The vestiges of a singular objective truth as the ideal remain more than common in the world, whether I choose to see them or not.

Even more common is a reactionary anti-religious attitude in general among many of my associates. As I scroll through social media posts, I often find that faith and exploration of the Holy, and the symbols that point to these as such, are often equated

with biblical literalism, rejection of scientific truths, ignorance, corruption, or lies. This may sound extreme, but I have been shouted down by a vehement proponent of science for quietly making the modest claim that there were dimensions of living that could not be adequately addressed by empirical science. First, words were put in my mouth, and then were ridiculed before being rejected as wrong ad hominem. I see a split remaining in the understanding of many people between extreme and exclusive evaluations of reason and faith.

The outer edges of this perceived "they" who judge, described in the examples above, would be easy to process if that was as deep as it went. It is not hard to shrug off extremism on the surface, yet beneath the surface instance of this aversion is the real obstacle or source. In the Yoga tradition, *vasanas* is the term for latent subconscious sensations and potentialities that feed the psycho mental stream.[188] These bear some resemblance to tacit knowledge described in Moustakas' heuristic research model, except that while vasanas are personal and transmigrate between incarnations in the karmic model, tacit knowledge is personally experienced and culturally transmitted, regardless of what happens to us when our bodies die. Nevertheless, this is the domain of the deeper sense of aversion and judgement.

The dynamic nature of the unconscious is the most significant obstacle that Yoga is aimed at overcoming.[189] Here is where the inner struggle between what is named and unnamed, between ego, Self and the representation of the wholly other, somehow relate. Here, in this subliminal realm, the germs of my isolated nature ask: how do I fit in? How do I belong? In the context of the workshop, we were to explore ways to be more fully

[188] Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, 42.
[189] Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, 45.

human. What is our nature as humans that we might be more fully so? The nature of habitual existence and the suffering this engenders are the qualities of this nature described in the Yoga texts. Our nature is what is to be overcome, what we strive for liberation from. On the other hand, to follow the way of Christ is to choose to be an outsider to this nature, to tradition. Somehow passing through suffering *as* human nature serves that aspect of being that is beyond our suffering nature. This is hard to look at, like the direct sunlight in your rearview mirror.

The seclusion I had created became a formal prescribed crutch to support my evasion of doubt. I called it a discipline. This is true, when the discipline is recognized and focused toward exploration of boundaries to liberation, but when it becomes habitual or reflexive, it serves the opposite function. I did not want to be seen. I did not want to be seen for what I sought imperfectly to overcome, and my efforts were diverted away from that vulnerability and so became distractions from the truth of presence that I sought. The struggle against distraction became a distraction itself. I judged myself so harshly that it was very difficult to see past the provisional nature of my success or failure, or that anyone else might see differently. I doubted my practice because I judged its value against what it was aimed at achieving in ideal terms, and inevitably, I came back to the recognition of being fallible, of being distracted, of being swept this way and that way by desires and aversions. Why this judgement should be negatively experienced is ironic. These qualities are assumed as that which is to be overcome in Yoga practice. This is why we practice faith and discipline. The irony is that we practice to overcome one aspect of our nature, to fully realize another aspect of our nature. This is the light, only seen in reflection, which is so hard to look into.

The workshop brought this to a head for me rather unexpectedly. I was asked if I could facilitate exploration of the body and breath as a means to becoming more fully human. I said yes, that I would do so, while at the same time, I was caught in the side of the reflected truth that saw my practice as overcoming humanity while neglecting what this overcoming was really for. It is not an all or nothing proposition. To my mind, the life of Christ is an amplified symbolic objective that instructs and inspires at the same time that it humbles. It describes an ideal relationship between the Holy and human life that, on the one hand, we may try to emulate literally only to our peril, while on the other hand, we must cultivate imperfectly in order to discover our greatest authenticity as humans. The path of the yogi may be aimed at objectives too lofty to see from the ground of ordinary lived consciousness, but ongoing, incremental change through challenge moves us and transforms us on that path. The expectations I placed on myself in isolation were generated in reference to these amplified symbolic objectives. They were missing the reflective reference of others. I was trying somehow to satisfy a mistaken belief that in order to be positively evaluated, I had to have already arrived at a place that I was only beginning to journey towards, a place which, in fact, may only reside in symbolic terms to living in the world.

Salvation and liberation have similar meaning to my experience. Freedom expands as we die to our small selves. Or put another way, the subjective experience of freedom is in direct proportion to our level of awareness. As I recognize my misapprehensions and reroute my self-sabotaging habits, I change what I am able to see; I broaden my choices; I feel greater openness to life and its possibilities. Salvation is the same experience looked at from a different direction. I am saved when I die to the world, when I no longer sense

feeling doomed to addiction. Addiction to ideas of false duty, to the complex of honour and shame, to imagined expectations of others, to particular ways of perceiving the world, are all forms of bondage. This bondage is through misapprehension of the nature of finitude in relation to what is other than the finite experience of nature. This bondage is the result of mistaking the finite and transient nature of my particular life and thoughts (*prakriti)* with the universal ground of reality or consciousness *(Purusha).*

The world and this life are simultaneously beautiful and terrible. It is unimaginable for there to be the one side without the other. Any attempt to remove one side renders experience pointlessly insipid in the absence of challenge. There needs to be something not only to be free from, like suffering, but also something to be free for. That something that salvation and liberation are for is what they serve. That is beyond the ken of nature and struggle and suffering and beauty, while it is somehow in relation to these experiences. I sense that this is the meaning of the flower in the fever dream of my adolescence, the dream that revisited me while I sought escape in philosophy, at a time of turmoil between what I sought to escape in doubt and what I sought in faith and practice. Actualization of life and living as nature means dying to our primordial unity, that which we cannot see but intuit as our origin and destination. Freedom from suffering means perishing to nature.[190] I love the world; I am afraid.

I found in the documenting of the workshop that I have a strong aversion to explicit reference to God. It is interesting that I would make such a discovery at this stage, and perhaps it is not so much a discovery as it is a recognition. This was not a completely new phenomenon to my experience; rather, it was something I had seen many times

[190] Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, 45.

before but never acknowledged explicitly. Throughout the research process, I have written about the ideas of others and so was rather sheltered from taking direct responsibility for the words on the paper. My journals were different. No one would see them; they were my inner chamber, more akin to the voice of prayer. Yet even there, I found the words that might name or describe God unsettling.

On the one hand, there is the tradition in the Hebrew scriptures where the name is not uttered and all representation is hidden away from view of anyone but the initiates to the inner sanctum, priests of Aaron. In my mid-twenties, when I came back to Edmonton from university, I was at a loss to fill the space that my studies had occupied. Underemployed with an arts degree, I chose the Bible as my reading project. I recall the process of interiorizing many of the strange codes and regulations. My roommates must have thought I was going mad. It was true that I absorbed, or perhaps recognized, in that exercise some of the taboos and superstitions that had subliminally accrued over the years with regard to faith, and the jealous singularity of faith that was demanded in some of the scriptures; the demands of a personified deity not to worship any other Gods. A little literalism found some unconscious purchase in those days. Perhaps most important is that everything about personal representation of God is fallible. Struggles of various scholars to describe the indescribable negatively had abounded in my pursuit of medieval philosophy in school, yet deeper than that was a feeling that to name and describe the ineffable was anathema.

So how could I write about this except in the most private way? When I went to the workshop, I was not being asked to reveal my inner fears of what might happen if I crossed this line in my mind, but that is exactly how it felt. In this thesis project, not only

would I have to describe some element of this process to others, but I would be laying the groundwork for etching it in stone, writing for others to see and judge. I would be writing words attached to what I have always felt I had no place to even think outside of some exercise in the gravest of hubris. In one sense, the Holy has come to mean the ineffable to me. The more explicit any attempt to describe it, the greater its understanding is distorted. To become attached to such distortion speaks both of overweening pride and to idolatry.

I experience the fear of this hubris singing like an alarm bell when the picture is turned outside in and the indescribable is posited at the most interior of each of us, as soul, *atman*, or a spark of the divine. In the scriptures of the Yoga tradition, this is the inner sanctum to be gradually excavated and explored. Moment by moment, experience by experience, discerning through the stream of lived events, their finitude and transience dances in contrast to the unqualified indescribable nature of being beneath and through it all.

There is something akin to what physicists call an event horizon that surrounds the Holy. In normal waking consciousness, we are mostly blind toward the Holy from inside experience, except when it is given natural form by metaphor or symbol. If one were to be poised just outside the point of no return of an infinite gravitational field found in a singularity or black hole, I can imagine a palpable fear of crossing the threshold and being unable to return. Now, being seen from the inside looms large in the window as I approach. More specifically, what that means as a potentiality to my unique being in nature, to my relations with others, to any possibility of freedom from what I both seek and hide from in life. If God lives in our deepest interiority, then there is no escape, no

hiding, or dissembling. `God must see through every pair of eyes and every conceivable analogue to seeing. Everything hangs in the balance like the fine line in my first nightmare dream. Touch the line, cross the threshold, and there is no turning back.

What shields me from the truth of this terrible possibility is precisely what Yoga practice is designed to address and mitigate. Identification with ideas is a buffer against the full force of the reality which confronts us. Our minds churn out ideas endlessly with more or less accurate correlation to that which they might represent. This stream of thinking, imagining, remembering is so strong and constant when unchecked that it becomes mistaken for the fact of existence. It is in fact the nature of *avidya* or ignorance as the primary source of suffering to be overcome, as the greatest hindrance to liberation in the Yoga Sutras.[191] I only realized how enmeshed I was in my own interiority at the expense of all else when I began Yoga practice. I had no idea that I was addicted to ideas. Addiction to ideas feels easier from the place where they reside unchecked, but the ease of this condition is only the illusion of habit. Once the reality of the situation is revealed, even in the most fleeting sense, then it becomes a habit tainted with doubt and guilt about being able to do better or not doing enough or ultimately what happens if I did succeed in being established in my essential nature and what that would mean.

It is tempting from the perspective of perceiving the world as ideas to assign the Holy some qualities. Many have tried; Schleirmacher's creature feeling and Otto's mysterium tremendum are examples of this, yet my sense from the turmoil of this project and distilled by the circumstance of the workshop is that maybe the Holy is rather a relative experience after all. Perhaps it is a relative experience with intimations of the absolute.

[191] Ravindra, The Wisdom of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 60.

In one sense, the extreme circumstances of the contrast between relative experience in nature and intuitions of the absolute generates ideas of extreme nature. Heaven and hell, bliss and condemnation somehow in their stark contrasts evoke the utter difference, which is in itself a signal of that to which the Holy points. Yet, it is only so because it is through the world of experience and contrast that our relations, from the most fleeting to the most primordial and eternal, are projected. My heaven, my ultimate concern along with my hell, my worst fears are just extrapolations into the realm of the infinite from changeable finite conditions of relativity.

This does not mean that there is nothing there that calls, nor that there is no reality in that which I seek beyond the event horizon of normal experience. Rather, it means that the experience and the ideations that churn forth endlessly from nature's activity are simply not identical with what is other or wholly other than nature. The key is their relation to each other. What is wholly other is related to every instance of manifestation. What is manifest may only be apprehend by our minds as contrast. This is how every instant may be an aperture to the Holy. This is why the perception of consciousness changes so remarkably when the cycle of addiction to the interiority of our ideas is interrupted, even if only briefly.

I think that this is why I cry when I try to sing certain songs in church. The exercise of singing in a group actualizes the recognition of my particularity joining in the singular beauty of everchanging continuity. I join freely, yet I am drawn as well, and the momentum of what is beyond me and my little world pulls me out of my aloneness and into an embrace without person or pettiness. It is the only part of a traditional worship service I invariably value. Yet, I have always felt shame and exposure alongside the

experience. The consciousness of others is also a self-consciousness that I have held onto and that keeps me from letting go and really seeing where the current of the music takes me. I am afraid to be seen as much as I am afraid of disappearing, of being subsumed into the vastness of what lies beyond the nature of my smallness.

In the workshop, I found myself assenting to a condition that transposed my habitual nature into a place beyond my normal context of comfort. I tried to return to my patterns, but they did not serve the environment. Essentially, in order to authentically engage the present circumstance of the group, I had to navigate without fixed plan or program. I certainly did not want to, but I had to. I knew this from the very outset when I received the first e-mail from the minister. The workshop was out of bounds, beyond my sense of comfort and control, but I had to make the choice to cross the line.

This whole circumstance of coming from a set of imaginary traditional boundaries and choosing to engage them differently or even discard them all together conjures a whirlwind of aversions and emotional obstacles. The jealous God will surely condemn this lack of faith, this adultery, this disobedience, this heresy. These are the vestigial impulses of the belief-centered personalized concepts of God from my childhood and my pre-questioning stages of faith. At the bottom of the experience of growing beyond the cocoon is the sense of exile. I have danced around the issue for years, rarely looking it in the face, and when I did, only with a passing cavalier dismissal. Yet in the place, space, and group of the workshop, I was forced in real terms and in real time to recognize that I am, to some, a heretic. I will accept no doctrine at face value. I choose the nature of my understanding of the Holy or lack of understanding thereof. I walk outside of any established fold.

How I have experienced this is to avoid the edges that define the boundary. Though sharing much of my Christian tradition with others, I do not attend to the group. I do not own publicly any allegiance. I am a member on no roll or mailing list. The easiest way not to stand apart is not to stand at all. Remain in isolation and the whole problem goes away. But from the inside, the dynamic continues. With choosing my own path and refining my own spiritual discernment, I swallow the external uncertainty of shared practice in the face of our finitude, and it becomes focused on the knife edge of my own isolated choice. No one dies for my sins but me. The responsibility is not buffered by any clergy or any unquestioned inherited, theological principle. The choice and the responsibility for the outcomes are mine alone.

This place of decisive separation is ironically what drove me beyond the circumference of the formal church. I recall a class in Christian scriptures where the professor asserted that a Christian is one for whom Jesus is the decisive revelation of God. I knew that there could be no singular decisive revelation. I knew that there must be infinite revelation. I knew that I had to be more than just a Christian if I was to take my understandings of the content of such identity seriously. That is, rather than deciding what is in or out of bounds on the basis of tradition, the action must be transformed into terms of radical inclusivity. It is an irony or, perhaps, a paradox that the defining borders of the Christian membership should be inclusivity of this sort to my mind, yet it is so.

The irony is that inclusivity is relative to the terms of understanding distinction. My life's program now becomes a question of relative tolerance. How far am I prepared to take this? What am I prepared to do to actualize this love I intuit? We know from the stories how far Jesus was prepared to take it. We know from the manuals of Yoga

practice the lengths yogis have been prepared to go to in order to live the idea of union, and what must be relinquished as costs.

In the workshop, we were all exploring how to be more fully human. At the same time, I was trying to live a program that aims at moving beyond what is traditionally human consciousness and behavior. Similarly, the Christian way described in the Gospels challenged attachments to norms and traditions and group membership in the institutions of their day. The responsibility is overwhelming. How can a fallible human know how to grow beyond the guiding principles of nature, the principles that separate us into discrete beings? How can I trust myself that much? How can I have faith that I am competent or worthy even of this responsibility? What if I fail and end up discovering just an inflated ego in the depth of my being? Worse yet, deep in my heart, what if rather than a spark of the divine or a pure union of absolute consciousness, I discover nothing at all?

One of the speakers at the conference sailed out toward the horizon knowing the earth was not flat. That is why I did not read their books. They were too close to home for comfort. In a way, I recognize in retrospect that this was the elephant in the room for me from the start. This story represented someone who pushed the boundary in order to articulate their authentic experience honestly within the group, yet the larger group brought down judgement and censure. I feared the story, yet there it was. I believe this is what can happen when you are truly honest, when you make yourself vulnerable. They will come with pitchforks and take you to the dungeons where they will show you the instruments first. It is that or exile. It is that or submission to what is not the truth you

know in your heart. This is the subtext to my imagination of what it would be like to live this experience.

Yet also right there in flesh and blood was the fact that, though separated on one level, this does not mean that we are alone. This person found through courage that there were others around them who felt the same way and this gave them the courage to stand up. They stood together and their feet had purchase on the ground. They were seen and they were heard, and they had to be acknowledged a place. Separation was not decisive because it held that place of reunion somehow also in the heart of its dynamic nature.[192]

Then the Seer resides in its essential nature.[193] At the heart of separation and reunion is seeing and somehow being seen, of somehow both being subject and object of searching and finding. From the outside in, there is first the peer closest at hand, then the circle of peers, then society, nature, and ultimately God. All of these have the potential for intimacy, but this is from the outside in, positing separation as the first order or quality of being. Where my separation is wielded like a protective shield, all these dimensions of otherness, from the locally other to the wholly other, are potential threats, intrusions, oppressive presence to my isolation and my sense of autonomy and safety.

To be seen from the inside out, it is somewhat different. Where the Seer is at the heart of all unqualified being, Intimacy is unavoidable. God looks out through my pettiness and fallibility like through a dirty windshield. I am naked in my accountability to the source of seeing. I am responsible to the universe as this same seeing sees through the eyes, however clouded, of every single being I recognize as life and every part of life that

[192] W.P. Jones, Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythm of Christian Belief (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 21.
[193] Ravi Ravindra, The Wisdom of Pananjali's Yoga Sutras, 8.

eludes my narrow recognition. There is no escape. It boils down to distilling the distinction between others and the wholly other. This distillate is then sublimated into the spirit of the question: how is the wholly other any different from the notion that there are no others? This must lie beyond the event horizon of my waking life. I can only feel the answer as beyond the grasp of words.

Practicing presence turns out to be an endeavor with variable modes. It is illusive, yet even when seemingly absent, it is there in a latent sense. When I am lost in a daydream and have slipped cognitively away from material reality, I am still in the world of time and space. I know this when the dream fades and I find myself in the place that is other than the daydream. This is how I experience daydreams as a mode of presence. I may inhabit any number of degrees of presence and also inhabit different degrees of awareness. I may be lost in the daydream and then snap out of it, becoming aware of having daydreamed only after the dream has dissolved. There is also the possibility of imagining while remaining grounded in the fact that I am imagining.

The human organism is complex and the nervous system connects a vast array of everchanging data as subjects for potential awareness. These are modes or dimensions with which we might be present. I may be present to the experience of self in respect to my physical body. This may extend to my physical presence in a material context, that is, to my material environment. This presence or awareness may extend to the fact that there are other selves and their conditions relative to myself. There is a universe of relations from the material chemistry of nature through the dynamism of change all the way up to communities of different organisms and even those we recognize as close enough to us to be considered others.

Practicing presence may inhabit any of these forms, and all of these forms are recognized only through relationship. My daydream is recognized when I snap out of it. My body is defined by the boundary of my skin. The body that I use to type these words is known as distinct from your body that reads these words. My culture and community are known through their relationships with other languages and culinary tastes and geographic homes. The more inclusive the scope of my relationships, the greater my awareness is of myself. The more related I am, the vaster my sphere of understanding self.

What happens if I narrow the field of my awareness and focus on just one thing? I close off all other things to be aware of and, if I am successful, become engaged in a relation of singular intimacy. One might choose anything: a candle, its flame, the air it needs, the light and heat it emits. Each opens up a world of relations in the sphere of presence to this paraffin phenomenon of the candle. Perhaps this is worthwhile in its own right, given all that one might experience in the true presence of a candle and what one might be able to learn about it in relation to one's self.

If one were to choose a single thing with which to be present, to enter into relationship with in the most intimate sense, what would it be? What is the most alluring force in the experience of being? Or as the theologian Paul Tillich would phrase it, "What is your ultimate concern?"[194] Of all the things to cultivate the intimate relation of presence with, which is the best? The answer is as variable as there are modes of presence and awareness. The possibilities of objects of worship are as numerous as there are subjects, and it is precisely the concerted practice of presence that I would describe as worship. It

[194] Paul Tillich, Systemic Theology Volume I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,1951), 218.

is difficult, like swimming underwater. I can only stay under so long before I must surface and break the spell, but with practice I become stronger and may stay longer and maintain calm against all my basest instincts that scream this is not where I belong and this is not where I may remain.

The Holy is a word used to describe a lot of things these days. It has often been diluted to mean something held in hyperbolically high esteem. From something that might not be articulated or touched, or comprehended in any more specific terms than mystery itself in the face of being, the Holy has, in the vernacular of the twenty-first century, become a thing among things. This, however, is a trick of language. Calling something by the terms that used to be reserved for the unutterable fails to capture the essence of the ineffable, no matter how persuasive the language. It is a trick we play with ourselves and our meaning-making vocabularies to avoid the most challenging subject to which we might be present.

Practicing presence in the context of a methodology has presented unique challenges. The nature of my methodology displays a map of sorts. A representation of the prescribed route has been followed with an aim in mind. The Holy is the aim, while presence and various techniques to encourage this are the map to this end. From the very outset, I was mindful of the difference between the map and the territory. One is a representation, a firm function of the imagination meant to guide but not to replace the territory. The territory is what our imaginations encounter if they have the courage and the discipline to take their eyes off the map and really look around.

My map has been the various dimensions of Yoga practice, informed by theological understandings of my Christian upbringing. From the outset of this project, there was a

recognition of many correlations between the two, as well as some tensions that needed to be explored in some way for the map to adequately represent how I understand reality. How I understand reality and interpret the map is in essence a series of expectations. Maps are travel plans; they guide us and provide security on the journey. They are only imaginations, but they represent the known.

In contrast to the methodology or the map, the counterpart to expectations are the details of the terrain as they really are. The territory is discovered only through exploration. The qualities of exploration are very different from those of expectation. They emerge one at a time from around the bend. We do not have a bird's eye view of our explorations the way we do the maps of our expectations. The path through this terrain is fraught with insecurity. This is the practice of experiencing the unknown as it emerges into awareness.

In the middle of this theological project, poised between the expectations of the plan and the explorations of what it actually represents, is both a series of different ways of expecting and dimensions of exploration. The middle term is myself. This involves my self-perception or ego as it is interrelated with my physical body, and this is the site of departure for most Yoga practice. The moment I set foot upon the path and looked up from the map, however, I found myself in the process of exploring the world. This is the starting point for everyone's experience; this means relating with others. Family, friendship, professional and political relations with others form my relationships with the world at large, which take on the scale of something akin to a map, yet distinct. The more complex the network of relationships, the more tempting it is to abstract from the intimacy of the exploration and to begin to represent the experience in the topographical

terms of my expectations and to simply expand the map. Often, I do not even immediately realize I have taken my eyes off the road and have retreated back into the plan.

This is especially true when I consider the goal or destination of my charted expectations. My spiritual endeavor, as represented by the discipline of presence, has been to link the self with not only others in relationships but in an expanded sense that brings this relation into the dimensions of world, cosmos, and if one has the courage to utter it, God. There is a reason why the map of Yoga practice is a guide to incremental steps in discrete dimensions of being. Each step in every dimension is connected along the path, and everyone experiences the road differently and starts from a different place. However, perhaps one of the most important features of this method to spiritual discovery is that, from wherever we start, we must look up from our expectations and begin the struggle to keep looking up and encounter the world on its own terms rather than on those which we imagine. The goal is off the edges of the map. This is the first most important discovery in this work, and I learned it at the beginning as I relearn it at the end.

My experience has been that the physical practice, which was the beginning of this project, was where some of the greatest discoveries appeared as the project matured. I streamlined my life and physical activity in order to make time for concerted practice and reflection on this project. This focus was intended to concentrate my efforts and create a space for personal work. I chose to forgo much of what had been a varied practice of physical activity previously, including martial arts and running and going to the gym, in order to be centered on Yoga practice. This worked in the sense that it facilitated the regularity of my practice, but it also narrowed the scope of my experience of my self.

The other activities I had enjoyed challenged me in different ways. They brought things to my Yoga practice as much as my Yoga practice offered things to these other activities.

This changed the way I saw myself. I used to identify with things such as: I am a martial arts instructor, or I am a Yoga instructor, or I am a distance runner. I chose to make these changes and am convinced that they were important to this thesis project's unfolding, but they came with a feeling of loss. At the same time, during this project, I changed jobs, partly in order to create the stability necessary to make the work of this project possible. I used to be Steve the roofer, yet this year was the first in nearly twenty that I did not set up any contracts. One by one, the identifying activities of my life were stripped away even to the extent that I practiced Yoga on my own and did not venture into group settings for shared practice. The things that made me feel strong and confident, the things I felt myself to be good at, were disentangled from my identity over the course of the project. This was, at times, experienced as a sense of loss, especially when someone asked if I still engaged in these things. I came to not seek the company of my former pursuits as much to avoid these questions as for any other reason.

The effects were not all negative. Detaching myself from the former roles I played was also liberating. I was not identical with what I did with my body and had the opportunity to experience practice from outside the field of expectations that surround roles. My body changed too. The layers of activity I had formerly engaged in created layers of adaptation to protective measures. I employed these to protect myself from old injuries and avoid the recognition of vulnerability. When I stripped everything down to a personal practice, I was confronted with the realities of this practice outside the sphere of peer-driven programs. I thought my greatest challenge was to challenge myself, to

maintain a level of intensity in asana, to expand my pranayama practice, and to extend my seated meditation. These were all indeed challenges to a practice in isolation, but by far the subtler challenge was to recognize where I was and what I was experiencing without external reference points.

It was not until I was asked to move back out of my isolated practice and engage in a group again that I realized my vulnerabilities, observing how I felt unadorned by former roles with respect to others. A great deal of my self-perception and, as a result, my confidence had come to depend on the status I had formerly held in such group settings. The instructor or the sensei were acknowledged as roles within the field of very specific social dynamics. When that field or context dissolved, they were just ideas. I could only escape their gravitational pull as ideas by letting go of those practices in their specific contexts, and even then, I had to return to those contexts to recognize how I felt, no longer functioning with the protective armor of identity with a certain status.

This was the progression of my ego in response to these enforced changes in my life. They are intimately related to my discoveries on the purely physical plane. In order to maintain the idea I had of myself with respect to the roles I played before this project, I had been protecting myself from many unpleasant realities. I had to keep up appearances as well as practical production. Everything I did was centered around physical ability. I could not stop for injury, and so I adapted. This taught me something about my upbringing and about the way I treated myself. If weakness was to be acknowledged at all, it was to be worked around. It was not until I had been forced to re-examine my expectations of myself and my perception of the expectation of others that I was able to begin to recognize the depth of my self-deception.

Being present with something or someone does not mean just sharing time and space. I discovered this when I finally went to see a physician. That visit was the first step down a road to recognizing a different level of presence in the physical dimension of this project. It led me back through the realm of interaction with others and with respect to my body and health. I was forced to see the extent to which I had avoided the truth of my mortality. I will not be able to be as strong or as fast or as limber as I have been blessed with previously in my youth, but I may certainly only be my best if I am able to see though my own subtle dishonesty with myself. Accepting the truth with respect to my long-standing injuries was both humbling and encouraging. Being able to admit that I needed to treat and rehabilitate my injuries made me feel like I did not have to delude myself by working around anything. With help, I could address my tender spots and restore strength.

The whole experience of my body has begun to change since the process of addressing the imbalances of my protective adaptive behavior began. It is similar to when I first started Yoga practice and had very little body awareness at all. The experience of contrast in coming into awareness was like an awakening. Similarly, the realization of my adaptive delusion and avoidance is like a great weight lifted from the realization of myself.

As my perception of myself underwent revelations, I experienced correlative re-examination of several relationships with others. Some of these relationships had been ongoing for years and some were more recent. There were several individuals with whom I struggled in my interactions. I had noticed during the project that the more grounded I was in my personal practice, the more able I was to manage these challenges.

When my practice faltered, I would find myself grappling with feelings and projecting their cause onto certain associates. Sometimes it was so pronounced that I felt like I was in an ongoing mental wrestling match to control and reroute negative trains of thought. I would slip into identifying with the emotions that attended my inner narrative. I struggled to keep in front of ideas and feelings rather than letting them have sway over my sense of reality. I consumed a great deal of energy.

On one level, I was aware that my feelings were not identical with myself and that they were not required or caused by anyone else. It was up to me to manage how attached I became to passing feelings, yet the intensity of some of my challenging emotions was addictive. These negative thoughts and feelings formed a groove that deepened the more these were practiced. In the fall, following the workshop, I became acutely aware of how my expectations of myself had become a sort of addiction to a certain sense of control. My methodology and the regimented activities I followed as a result of it each day controlled the variables of my experience and became a hinderance as much as a comfort.

At this time, I became aware that there was a common thread to the people I was finding annoying around me. First, they were all around me, and second, they each had different strategies for asserting control over their environments. Each of these people employed a different strategy. One would try to inspire others to do as they did and feel as they felt, amplifying their inner world outward until they received resonant feedback. Another would take charge of situations in an assertive manner, imposing arbitrary authority over situations and people. Still another would try to undermine any authority or structure that imposed itself on situations, de-stabilizing relationships and fomenting doubt in decision-making processes.

Each of these caricatures of my associates represents a strategy used for assuming control of uncertainty. What occurred to me was that the various roles I had formerly played served a similar function. What also seemed clear was that my self-deception was a strategy of this type when I hid my injuries and subjected myself to long-term imbalance. I did not allow myself emotional expression, especially around those I found challenging, because it made my vulnerabilities transparent to others. These were all strategies of control, but mine were essentially passive, and when I encountered the active strategies of others, I felt manipulated and resentful.

Just as avoiding physical injury had led to adaptations that created imbalance in my body, so had avoiding my emotional reality become an imbalanced way of functioning in relation with other people in my life. It had become a standard procedure to keep my own counsel. Better to stay silent than to create waves. If I had nothing positive to say, it was better to say nothing, I told myself. It had become a mark of discipline to me that I was able to interact with others without influencing them explicitly with any negative judgements of my own. It was a delusion just like my neck injury, which was really a shoulder injury. I was mistaken to think that such behavior could be isolated to my internal world and that others would not perceive this in some way. This behavior on my part was observed, I am sure, but simply not understood. This protected me and protected them from me, and in essence, created my own little sphere of control over what came in and what went out of my emotional world. It also created a great deal of internal pressure, which I am grateful for having come to recognize even in a preliminary way. It is not over, but I see it now for what it is.

During this thesis project, I took for granted that the goal of my Yoga practice was a conception of the Holy, which was in some sense ironic. The phrase *wholly other,* for which Rudolph Otto[195] became so well known in his description of the Holy, is paradoxical. The identification of something other requires a relation with what is home or self or that which is immediate to experience. There are many degrees of distance or difference or separation between the figures in any relationship, but they are related nevertheless.

Internal to myself, there is a relationship between what is known consciously and what remains hidden somehow. There is an aspect of myself that is other, even in my interiority. There is a sense in which consciousness itself may be distinct in its unqualified sense from the contents of consciousness, as the sages of the Yoga tradition would maintain. The Seer must be distinguished from the Seen in order for us to be established in our most authentic self. This is another way in which the experience of the other may reside in the very kernel of my being. Otherness is reflected outwards in my perception of distinct people and cultures and reflected back, serving as a mirror. We are mirrors to each other, and learn of ourselves from our distinctiveness, which can only be appreciated through relationships. The greater our discernment of our own hearts and minds, the clearer the world of others will be. Honesty and compassion are required for authentic comprehension of the empirical world.

Somehow internal to the relativity of personal and interpersonal experience is the idea of a relationship that supersedes or underlies all other relationships. The other, amplified beyond the spectrum of the ordinary, becomes the wholly other. Ironically, it is this idea

[195] Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy (London: Oxford University Press, 1923)

that I focus on to ground myself in relationships with the tangible world. It is an idea upon which to meditate as its content seems ever definitively to be discovered. In my practice of presence, I seek to focus on what ultimately eludes me except by negation. The negation of the wholly other is in the details of relational life. Otherness as relation is the precondition in every dimension of being to life in all its forms. Therefore, transcendent relation may only be described in relative terms.

What is the experience of practicing presence in relation to the Holy? Put simply, my individual life is the only place from which the other, the wholly other, and the Holy make sense. From the outset, there was an unarticulated assumption on my part that the Holy was somehow identical with an objective reality. As a transcendent union, the Holy represented what was beyond relational experience. This idea was accompanied by a highly charged field of emotions and ideas that represented the very event horizon of life and death in both positive and negative hyperbolic symbols. Fear, awe, and in contrast, intense allure populates this landscape of ideas at the edges of relational life. This is where the experience of *mysterium tremendum* comes into play. This is where infinitesimal nature confronts the vastness of the cosmos and the ineffable mystery of being. This is where the idea of union subsumes the experience of communion.

While it remains from the perspective of my individual life that any idea or perception of the Holy might take place, I grow and change and interact with the idea of the other as well as the reality of others as I aim the practice of presence at what lies beyond or beneath normal lived experience. The other is the only thing I interact with, whether it is with internal respect to myself, with external respect to other beings, or in symbolic terms beyond normal relation and with respect to the vastness intuited beneath and beyond all

relativity. I have come to see the Holy as the most integral of all relationships, as the most profound relationship in the vast network of connections that define the whole of nature.

I believe there is profound wisdom in the teachings of the Yoga tradition that assert an isomorphism between microcosm and macrocosm. This is at the heart of meaning of ritual practice. My body reflects and directs my heart and mind, as the latter two reflect back onto my physical being. In my interactions with the world, my personal being projects onto and is reflected back from society and forms various fields of relationship. As the sense of self is so expanded in vaster ripples of connection, there comes a place where scope of the relation we experience becomes difficult to understand or describe except in the most abstract terms.

These abstract and symbolic representations are some of what I find the most beautiful and alluring notions in life, philosophy, theology, and in worship. At the same time, these representations can be a dangerous place. This is where I have been the most tempted to become engrossed in the map rather than attend to the messy details of the territory. Here, it is helpful to repeatedly ask oneself what the goal or purpose of spiritual practice really is. Where the experience of spiritual practice is aimed at that which is beyond reckoning, it is aimed ambiguously and may easily be distracted by ideas of arrival or what that might look like. Yet to be true to what we may really understand about the goal, which remains unseen, a certain submission of our expectations is required. I see this as something akin to Bultmann's crisis of faith, which inhabits each and every moment as a decisive choice to be made. I also see this as something akin to the perpetual challenge in practicing Yoga off the mat to distinguish between the essence

and the contents of consciousness—the struggle, moment to moment, of remaining present to the field of relationships we inhabit.

Faith in the practice is required, whether it is described in the language of the church or the principles of the mind in meditative discovery. In both cases, practice is the only tangible guide on the path to the unseen. It is easy to fall into the trap of feeling like I need to arrive at some point in order to know I am on the right path. This is the mistake of taking the stories that are meant to describe the path as the literal terrain to be navigated. It is easy, when engaged in struggle, to become attached to imaginings of what the resolution of that struggle would look like. I have found this to be true while working in the world toward social justice ends, when I have encountered those who become identified with the idea of a transformed world and lose sight of the work of transformation to be engaged in right in our midst. This is a place of despair, where the idea of the eternal eclipses the immanent signs of its presence. If I long for an ideal, I miss that which is most real and closest at hand. How can I come to know others if I am unknown to myself? How can I change society without changing that in me which contributes? My hopes and expectations are delusions that shield me from the real possibilities of change and discovery in authentic presence.

I have to continually ask myself what the practice is for here and now. If I lose sight of this uncertainty implicit in the asking, I will come to assume an ideal end or achievement that invariably obscures the reality of my relational life. It has become abundantly clear through this project that to seek arrival is a great pitfall. The place where I have most recently landed is to remind myself that this practice is a progressive discipline. It is about being present to change and difference in transformation through

which we may, at times, have a glimpse through contrast of the deeper web of connection beneath the changing churning vicissitudes of life. There needs perhaps to be an end metaphorically or expressed to the psyche archetypally, but I must never lose sight of the fact that symbols only represent and are not equivalent to what they symbolize.

My practice, my faith, seeks in each instance the potential communion of presence. When it is authentic, it opens a sense of immediacy, not with the idea or goal, but with the experience of uncertainty in the face of true liberation and death. Encounter with absolute other, union with the Holy in living immediacy, speaks to an experience beyond the normal relational reality of life. Only transformed consciousness may pass, and there is no going back across the threshold. The practice to this end is dying to my old self. This sacrifice is the ultimate submission of power to the uncertainty beyond causes and effects. We live in a field of choices and outcomes, yet there is a passive requirement as well as an active component to this spiritual discipline. I must be able to let myself go and trust my dissolution in the current of change if I am to be truly present to life as it is. This radical humility is terrifying, but that is why it is a crisis of faith that we encounter at every step and with each choice.

Conclusions

The practice of presence reveals and explores the relationship between experience of phenomena and the ideas that represent them. In this study, the phenomenon of the Holy has been the focus of exploration. Ideas of the Holy *in its self* may lie in the realms of the transcendent, beyond, or wholly other. Here, the Holy is represented as an ontological principle, a primordial symbol, or quite simply, that which is beyond words. We may experience presence *to* such ideas with awareness that they are representations, or we may inhabit the experience immediately as quality of presence. The grounding unity of being in the ontological sense may be felt as connection, or dependence. The primordial symbolic forms of the Holy are clothed in the tangible vestments of nature and the world. In this way, we may feel the Holy through the stories and images that the Holy inhabits in religious scripture and ritual. Nothing may be said of the ineffable except, ironically perhaps, that to approach it, one must be silent.

How does the practice of presence relate to the experience of the Holy? The ideas of the Holy may be thought of in psychological terms as internal forms that relate with one another as fields of identity. These may remain ideas only, or they may be exercised as explorations of identity in relation to greater Selfhood through the experience of inner relation. Ideas of the Holy may be expressed in terms of moral and ethical imperative. The Holy may be understood as ideals to strive towards in the world, or they may be actualized as struggle in the living moment of the present.

The living moment of the present is hard won and illusive. The idea of presence in abstract is immanent, always, yet when realized, I must recognize that I experience presence in the play of its relationship with absence and distinction. I may practice

returning over and over, and yet staying still slips my grasp. I have discovered the Holy to be experienced in the same way that presence is experienced. I may have ideas of the Holy in the same way that I may recognize presence as immanent conceptually, yet the quality of experiencing the Holy firsthand is shifting and variable through different modes of my human nature, a nature which bears different contents like a vessel turned to different purposes. I have rational faculties, psychological depth, moral and ethical challenge, and physical needs. Each dimension of life may be the vessel to convey the Holy, as each serves me with the opportunity to experience what lies within the ideal form as the experience of presence with depth and content.

How does the practice of presence relate to the experience of the Holy? Every moment and every circumstance may be an instance of the miraculous to the religious mind through the eyes of faith, just as every instant is the only instant when we reside in our essential present nature. We realize the intersection of the finite with the infinite, of our transience with the eternal in the moment of relationship that presence may open and that the Holy may inhabit.

In this study, Yoga has been the form, and the Holy has been the content. When, through practice and discernment, the forms we take are recognized as vessels and formed with reverence, then the contents may be recognized in their distinction from the vessel and in the manner in which they take the shape of their containers. We are both distinct from and inhabited by the Holy, whether we are aware of this or not, whether we experience our awareness as presence or not.

The methodology of this project employed two different dimensions of overlapping self-study. One was heuristic inquiry based on Clark Moustakas' model, and the other

was Yoga as understood through Patanjalis' Yoga Sutras. In an organizational or academic sense, the latter inhabited the former; Yoga took place within the stages of heuristic inquiry. In a practical sense, however, the heuristic program represented a snapshot in time of the life-long practice of self-study and discipline that is Yoga. They were explored as two resonant yet contrasting modes of intuitively grounded self-study and discipline.

Both these methods combined to reveal different dimensions of depth in experience through contrast. Practicing presence as the practice of Yoga revealed levels of physical illusion and limitation that had gone unrecognized but that came to light when the heuristic program allowed me to step back from the work that had driven the project. The emersion stage of the heuristic method focused the effort and commitment to the Yoga practice in a new order of intensity for me and broke new ground. This, in turn, uncovered expectations of myself alongside hopes and fears surrounding religious practice that had hitherto inhabited the tacit dimension of awareness. The unspoken assumption that experience should reflect ideal conceptualizations of the Holy if the practice of presence is to be deemed successful was just one such discovery.

Expectations and ideals, in fact, turned out to be the greatest obstacles to fully actualizing a relationship on a variety of levels. Expectations of Yoga practice and of its outcomes, expectations of others in the social dimensions of my life, expectations of how the project itself would unfold, all engendered hopes and fears that had to be experienced and recognized in order to settle into presence in different fields of my lived experience. The connection between all the dimensions of my lived experience, reflected in the eight limbs of Yoga practice, illuminated relationship as the focal point to the experience of the

Holy. The relationships between contrasting levels of awareness, across perceived boundaries to membership, and among myself and my peers all formed the nexus of discovering meaning and place in time and space. On a whole other level, these relationships in turn reflect the intuition of a deeper connection between nature and Spirit, between our particularity and its membership in the vastness we participate in. Presence is the quality of being that simultaneously inhabits the experience of togetherness and contrast and is known through each other as both union and communion.

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