“This is a classic book for every Yoga enthusiast, whether neophyte or seasoned practitioner.”
— Sarah Powers, author of Insight Yoga

THE PATH OF YOGA
An Essential Guide to Its Principles and Practices

Georg Feuerstein
“Whether you are a student of yoga or would like to become more familiar with this ancient Indian tradition, you will find this an easy-to-read guidebook that is based on authentic writings and experiences of some of India’s great yogis.”

—Booklist

“Certainly a staple of any well-rounded yoga collection.”

—Library Journal

“Feuerstein’s guide is an important pointer in the right direction that should also help readers understand the astonishingly sophisticated system that has emerged from a 5,000-year-old Indian spiritual tradition.”

—Publishers Weekly

“This is a classic book for every Yoga enthusiast, whether neophyte or seasoned practitioner.”

—Sarah Powers, author of Insight Yoga

“If you’re looking for a comprehensive yet very readable introduction to the important schools and practices of the Yoga tradition, look no further. A master work by a master scholar-practitioner, this is the only book I ever recommend to students wanting to lay a historical and philosophical foundation as they begin the serious study of Yoga.”

—Richard Rosen, author of The Yoga of Breath

“This is an excellent little introduction to some of the practices and theologies of Yoga, with particular emphasis on the Tantra traditions, which, although not mainstream in Hinduism, have recently become popular in the West. Feuerstein is taken seriously by both academics and yogis, and authoritatively combines the qualities of scholarship with the sensitivities of a practitioner. I always learn much from his writings.”

—Edwin Bryant, professor of Hindu Religion and Philosophy, Rutgers University

ABOUT THE BOOK
This overview of the essentials of Yoga is meant to both broaden and deepen the understanding of beginning students. It covers all the basic elements of this ancient discipline and philosophy
of India—including Yoga poses, diet, breath control, meditation, mantras, Kundalini energy, and more. It also includes newly translated excerpts from the scriptures and pays special attention to branches of Yoga, such as Tantra, that are of great interest to Western students but are frequently misunderstood.

GEORG FEUERSTEIN, Ph.D., is internationally respected for his work on Yoga and is the author of over fifty books. He has designed and taught several distance-learning courses on Yoga philosophy for Traditional Yoga Studies. For more information, go to www.traditionalyogastudies.com.
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Preface to the 2011 Edition

When Shambhala Publications told me that they were preparing a new edition of this book, now titled *The Path of Yoga*, I was glad to avail myself of the opportunity to amend and improve the text. In particular, I have made brief comments at the end of certain chapters to update the reader on my relevant current thinking. Since the publication of the first edition of *The Shambhala Guide to Yoga* over ten years ago, I have authored many new books, but the present work remains one of my favorites. It serves, I feel, very well its original purpose as an essential guide to Yoga.

Those wishing to delve deeper into what I consider the world’s most versatile and satisfying spiritual tradition might want to consult *Yoga: The Deeper Dimension*, also published by Shambhala. For a truly comprehensive overview of Yoga’s philosophy, history, and literature, my book *The Yoga Tradition* (Hohm Press, 2008) will satisfy even the most knowledge-thirsty reader. If yet more detail is sought, I have put together an 800-hour distance-learning course comprising nearly a thousand printed pages. Numerous students from around the world have taken this course, which is available through [www.traditionalyogastudies.com](http://www.traditionalyogastudies.com).

For further study, I can also heartily recommend my book *Yoga Morality* (Hohm Press, 2007) which applies the moral disciplines of Yoga to our contemporary world with its copious social, political, and environmental problems.

But for now, I hope that the present publication will help launch you on a journey of discovery that can genuinely bring you wisdom, direction, and joy.

—Georg Feuerstein
Preface

*The sage yoked in Yoga soon attains the Absolute* (brahman).

—BHAGAVAD-GITA V.6

I have been studying the Yoga tradition since the early 1960s, and I continue to be awed by its enormous wealth of experience and understanding of the human condition. My own life has been deeply, lastingly, and benignly affected by the combined wisdom of the great teachers of Yoga, past and present. I have also seen the beneficial influence of Yoga practice in the lives of many others. I believe that this ancient and vast tradition is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago, possibly more so.

All my various books on Yoga and other aspects of Indian spirituality have served one purpose: to make the genuine traditions available and accessible to those who are dissatisfied with watered-down Western derivatives and who wish to become informed about the authentic original teachings. The present book, too, is in alignment with this overall purpose of my life’s work, which was first conceived and articulated in my late teens.

Each of my books is an attempt to offer yet another perspective on India’s spiritual traditions. In the present book, I am providing an overview of the essentials of Yoga—understood not as a system of calisthenics but as a full-fledged spiritual tradition—that can both broaden and deepen the understanding of beginning students as well as serve as a compass for more advanced practitioners. I have singled out Classical Yoga and Tantra-Yoga (including Hatha-Yoga) for more detailed discussion, because these two branches of the Yoga tradition are of the greatest interest to Western students but are still often badly misunderstood.

I am very grateful to Samuel Bercholz and the editorial team of Shambhala Publications for inviting me to write this guide to Yoga. Working on this book gave me the opportunity to delve again into my favorite Sanskrit scriptures and to listen to the clarifying and inspiring thoughts of masters like Yajnavalkya, Patanjali, Vyasa, Gaudapada, Shankara, Ashtavakra, Gheranda, Svatmarama
Yogindra, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Nikhilananda, Swami Muktananda, and Nisargadatta Maharaj. I have quoted them whenever possible.

May this book bring understanding (*vijnana*), wisdom (*jnana*), and joy (*sukha*)! *Aum tat sat.*

—Georg Feuerstein

Georg Feuerstein, PhD, is internationally respected for his work on Yoga and is the author of over forty books. Since entering into semi-retirement in 2004, he has designed and tutored several distance-learning courses on Yoga philosophy for Traditional Yoga Studies (*www.traditionalyogastudies.com*).
A Note on Pronunciation

Sanskrit words and names in this book are rendered according to a simplified system of transliteration commonly used in nonscholarly literature. The reader’s attention is drawn to two spellings in particular:

The spelling c indicates the sound *ch*, as in *church*, in words such as *cakra*, *citta*, and the like.

The spelling *ch* indicates an aspirated *ch* sound, similar to the *ch-* in *beach-house*; hence, *Chandogya-Upanishad*.

The spelling *sh* is used for both the retroflex ś and the palatal ś, with the following exceptions. The letter s alone is used in the title *Sri* (pronounced *shree*) for names such as *Sri Aurobindo* and *Sri Ramakrishna*, and in the name *Sivananda* (pronounced *Sheevananda*).
1

Introducing Yoga

Evenness (samatva) is called Yoga.
—BHAGAVAD-GITA II.48

Yoga as Unitive Discipline

From the broadest possible perspective, all the various yogic approaches—and there are many—have the same overall purpose. That purpose is to help the spiritual practitioner transcend the ego-personality, or “lower” self, so that he or she may realize the “higher” Reality, whether it is conceived as the transcendental Self or as the Divine (God or Goddess). This spiritual realization is not necessarily understood in the same way by the various branches of Yoga. However, even though the schools of Yoga may differ in their preferred method and also in their interpretation of the nature of ultimate spiritual realization, all these differences can be regarded as creative variations on the same fundamental theme: They all are designed to lift the individual out of his or her ordinary perception of, and relationship to, the world.

How we perceive things determines how we relate to them, and, in turn, how we relate to things feeds back into our perception of them. In other words, there is a close relationship between our thoughts and actions, or our attitudes and behavior. Thus, if we perceive a situation to be threatening, we are apt to fight or take flight. The Sanskrit texts employ the classic example of a person running away from a snake when in reality it is only a rope. On the other hand, if a child thinks of a stranger as kind or well-meaning, he or she is likely to respond to the stranger with a trust that may prove misplaced or even fatal. Similarly, if we look upon the world as a vale of tears, as did the Romantics, we are apt to behave in ways quite different from staunch philosophers of social progress and utopian optimism.

Finally, if we truly understand that our material life is inherently limited and that the pleasures we can derive from our body and mind are likewise limited, merely temporary, and certainly not ultimately fulfilling, then we can open ourselves to the possibility of
a new perception: that happiness is independent of our nervous system and the stimuli that can excite it. This is indeed the great message of all forms of Yoga: Happiness is our essential nature, and our perpetual quest for happiness is fulfilled only when we realize who we truly are. This realization is an awakening to our Selfhood, which transcends the body-mind, the ego-personality, and the horizon of the world reflected in our ordinary experience. All this, and more, is captured in the word yoga.

The term yoga is a common word in the Sanskrit language—the language in which most of the Yoga scriptures are written. It also happens to be one of the most versatile Sanskrit terms, having a whole range of meanings that extend from simple “union” to “team,” “constellation,” and “conjunction.” It is derived from the verbal root yuj, meaning “to harness, yoke, prepare, equip, fasten.”

The male practitioner of Yoga is known as a yogin (or yogi in the nominative case) and the female practitioner as a yogini. Frequent synonyms are yoga-vid (“knower of Yoga”) and yukta (“yoked one”). Sometimes the word yoga-yuj (“one who is yoked in Yoga”) is used. A master of Yoga may be referred to as a yoga-raj (“king of Yoga”) or yogendra (from yoga and indra, meaning “lord”).

In addition to yoga and yukta, the verbal root yuj also yields the old Sanskrit word yuga, denoting “yoke,” which is the literal yoke placed upon an ox and the yoke or burden of the years. It is probably in the latter, metaphoric sense that yuga is applied to the four great world cycles, which according to Hinduism, continuously revolve, thus creating history. At present we are thought to be in the final world age, the kali-yuga, in which spirituality and morality are at their lowest ebb. The kali-yuga is the Dark Age, which is destined to terminate in a convulsive cataclysm, accompanied by a major purging of humanity. Thereafter a new Golden Age will begin, starting the four-phase cycle all over again.

The term yoga is closely related to a number of words in various Indo-European languages, including the English yoke, the German Joch, and the Latin iugum, which all have the same meaning. In a spiritual context, the word yoga can have two principal meanings. It can stand for either “union” or “discipline.” In most instances, both connotations are present when the term yoga is used. Thus dhyanayoga is the unitive discipline of meditation; samnyasa-yoga is the unitive discipline of renunciation; karma-yoga is the unitive discipline of self-transcending action; kriya-yoga is the unitive discipline of ritual; bhakti-yoga is the unitive discipline of love and devotion to the Divine, and so on.

What does unitive mean here? It describes Yoga’s disciplined approach to simplifying one’s consciousness and energy to the point
where we no longer experience any inner conflict and are able to live in harmony with the world. More specifically, unitive refers to the goal of many branches and schools of Yoga, which is to realize our essential nature, the Self (*atman, purusha*), by consciously uniting with it. This understanding of Yoga is characteristic of those teachings that subscribe to a nondualist metaphysics according to which the Self is the ultimate singular Reality underlying all phenomena.

A different understanding prevails in the dualist schools, notably Patanjali’s *yoga-darshana* (“vision/system of Yoga”), which is also known as Raja-Yoga or Classical Yoga. For Patanjali, the yogic process is not so much one of union with an ultimate Reality as disunion (*viyoga*), or disconnection, from the ego-personality. But the final outcome is the same, for when the spiritual practitioner has succeeded in transcending the ego, he or she simultaneously realizes the Self, or Spirit.

Is Yoga then a form of religion or mysticism? It is not possible to give a simple answer to this question, because the Yoga tradition is vast and complex and includes many approaches, some of which even contradict each other when viewed from an outward perspective. Thus it comprises schools that espouse total renunciation (*samnyasa*) and those that insist on the proper performance of one’s obligatory works (*karman*) in the world; schools that regard dispassionate wisdom (*jnana*) as the only means to spiritual freedom and Self-realization and those that place love and devotion (*bhakti*) above all other methods; and schools that favor a complicated ritualism and those that preach the path of methodless spontaneity (*sahaja*).

Some branches and schools of Yoga are more religious, entailing elaborate ceremonies, temple worship, and sect membership; others are more mystical, focusing on individual renunciation and meditation. Perhaps the most appropriate label for all of them is *spirituality*: Yoga is India’s particular brand of spirituality, and its constituent branches and schools share a common origin and a broad history that covers the remarkable span of five thousand years.

Just as the branches of a tree are attached to a single stem, the diverse strands within Yoga are all connected to a basic stock of ideas and practices. In fact, there is considerable theoretical and practical overlap between schools, and in many cases only a slight shift of emphasis demarcates one school from another. Also, even within one school a variety of opinions may be present, as teachers develop their own explanations on the basis of their scriptural interpretations and personal experiences. What unites these schools
and branches of Yoga is their overarching goal, which is Self-realization.

The teachers of Yoga speak of this Self-realization as liberation (moksha, mukti, apavarga, kaivalya), awakening (bodha, bodhana, bodhi, jagrat), wisdom (jnana, vidya, prajna), independence/freedom (svatantrya), perfection (siddhi), or extinction (nirvana). And they provide many names for the ultimate Reality that is realized by the adept, including Supreme (para), Supreme Self (parama-atman), Supreme Object (parama-artha), Absolute (brahman), Being (sat), Nonbeing (Asat), Awareness/Consciousness (cit, cithi, cetana, samvid), Bliss (ananda), God (deva), Goddess (devi), Lord (ish, isha, ishvara), Infinity (ananta), Full/Fullness (purna, purnata), Void/Voidness (shunya, shunyata), Light (jyotis, prakasha), Immortality (amritatva, amarata), and Unborn (aja).

A Bird’s-Eye View of the History of Yoga

No one knows exactly when the Yoga tradition began. What is certain is that it was already considered ancient at the time of the Bhagavad-Gita (Lord’s Song), the most popular of all Yoga scriptures, composed some twenty-five hundred years ago. Evidence of yogic beliefs and practices can be seen in the archaic Rig-Veda (Knowledge of Praise), which is the fountainhead of the sacred heritage of Hinduism. The Rig-Veda, consisting of 1,028 hymns composed in archaic Sanskrit, has recently been dated back to the third millennium BCE and earlier, which makes it the oldest literary document in any Indo-European language.

The Vedic hymns—the word veda means “knowledge”—are the inspired creations of seer-poets (kavi), whose spiritual discipline enabled them to look beyond the ken of the five senses and the sense-bound mind. These hymns are the distillate of their visionary experiences, ecstasies, and mystical insights and are traditionally regarded as revealed wisdom. All subsequent sages and religious thinkers within the fold of Hinduism, to one degree or another, based themselves on the Vedic revelation (shruti). Those who did not, like Gautama the Buddha and Vardhamana Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, were considered to stand outside the pale of Hinduism. The Rig-Veda is one of four Vedic hymnodies, the other three being the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, and the Atharva-Veda. They are rich depositories of early Indian spirituality, which we may style a form of archaic Yoga.

A variety of yogic motifs are also depicted on the artifacts of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization, which flourished in northern India from around 2800 to 1900 BCE. A growing number of scholars believe
that the culture reflected in the hymns of the Rig-Veda, the oldest of four Vedic hymnodies, is identical to or significantly overlaps with the Indus-Sarasvati civilization. My book In Search of the Cradle of Civilization, written with Subhash Kak and David Frawley, contains a review of the latest thinking on this important historical subject and chronicles the scholarly revolution that is under way. For a long time, it was thought that the Sanskrit-speaking Vedic people arrived in India no earlier than 1500 BCE and that they conquered the Dravidian-speaking natives as a result of their superior military power and skill. Upon discovery of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization—formerly called the Harappan or Indus civilization—in the early 1920s, scholars automatically assumed that invading Vedic Aryans were responsible for the destruction of that civilization. They simply moved the time of the invasion forward to around 1700 BCE.

The new evidence shows, however, that the Indus-Sarasvati civilization had undergone grave tribulations long before then. In particular, the great Sarasvati River, along which hundreds of villages and presumably also several large urban settlements were located, had ceased to exist by 1900 BCE. It is hard to imagine the human suffering caused by this tragedy, which was probably triggered by massive earthquakes and tectonic shifts. But the loss of what was once India’s mightiest river did not spell the end of that civilization. Rather its center shifted from the Sarasvati River, whose dry bed now runs through the enormous Thar Desert, to the fertile banks of the Ganges. There a revival took place, which led to the familiar Hindu civilization, a direct offspring of the early Vedic civilization.

We can safely say that the earliest beginnings of the Yoga tradition can be found in the sacrificial ritualism of the Vedic people, who created both the impressive towns of the Indus and Sarasvati Rivers and also the beautiful and often enigmatic Vedic hymns. They practiced a spirituality that acknowledged the vital connection between the visible and the invisible realms. Through sacrificial rituals (yajna) they sought to establish, affirm, or strengthen the inner link with the heavenly powers, the gods and goddesses of the Vedic pantheon. The affairs of the world had to be conducted in the light of the divine order (rita) so that harmony, happiness, and prosperity could prevail.

In their quest for spiritual illumination, the Vedic Aryans fully understood that behind the multiplicity of worldly things, and behind the various deities, lies an irreducible unity, which they called the One (eka). The wise, declares one of the Rig-Vedic hymns (I.164.46), speak of it “in many ways”—a clear indication that they were no primitive polytheists but appreciated the language of
relativity.

To reach that transcendental Singularity, the seer-bards, as another Rig-Vedic hymn (X.101.2) puts it, made their visions (dhi) harmonious and stretched them on the “loom” of cosmic existence. These inspired seers and hymn composers compared their sacred task to harnessing the plow (yuga)—a metaphor foreshadowing the later use of the term yoga to mean the harnessing or restraining of the senses and the mind so as to yield a quiet inner space. Tempted by the unruly senses, the mind, notes one Vedic bard, “flutters here and there like a bird” (Rig-Veda X.33.2). Only in the depth of the still heart can the liberating truth be found. For the heart is the seat of the Divine, the connecting point between the finite and the infinite. As the Rig-Veda states in mystical imagery:

The whole universe is stationed in your home within the ocean, within the heart, in life. May we gain your honeyed wave that is brought to the edge, the junction of the waters. (IV.58.11)

The “honeyed wave” is the secret name of the butter used in the Vedic oblation, which is offered into the fire not only from a ladle but also from the human heart in the form of prayers, songs of praise, and inspired aspirations. The archaic Yoga of the Vedas often bore the name tapas, which literally means “heat” or “flow” and is a reference to the inner heat or energy produced by asceticism.

Thus Yoga looks back upon a history of five millennia and more. However, as a full-fledged spiritual tradition going by the name yoga, it is approximately two and a half millennia old. More specifically, the Yoga tradition crystallized at the time of the Katha-Upanishad (Secret Teaching of the Kathas), the Bhagavad-Gita, and the Shvetashvatara-Upanishad (Secret Teaching of the Whitest Horse). In the Katha-Upanished, Yama, God of Death, presents the Yoga tradition in the following way:

Different indeed is the good (shreyas); different is the pleasant. Both to their various ends ensnare a person (purusha). Of these, it is well for one opting for the good. But he who chooses the pleasant falls short of the purpose [of life].

The good and the pleasant have human [relevance]. Considering both, the sage distinguishes [them carefully]. The sage chooses the good over the pleasant. The fool, [intent on] acquiring and keeping (yoga-kshema), chooses the pleasant.
After considering [this matter], you, O Naciketas, have rejected the pleasurable desires that appear pleasing. You have not followed the way of wealth, in which many humans sink [as into a quagmire].

Ignorance (avidya) and what is known as wisdom (vidya) are far apart and divergent. I deem Naciketas to be desirous of wisdom, for many [lesser] desires have not distracted you.

Fools, abiding in the midst of ignorance and deeming themselves wise and learned, go about deluded, like blind men led by a blind man.

The passage (samparaya) [beyond death and to the ultimate Reality] is not evident to the fool, who is careless and deluded by the glamor of wealth. Thinking “this world exists, there is no other,” he falls again into my [Death’s] power.

Many are not even able to hear [of the ultimate Reality, the Self] and many do not know, though they have heard of It. Wondrous is the teacher, skillful he who has attained It! Wondrous the knower instructed by the skillful [teacher who knows the Self].

Taught by an inferior man, He [the ultimate Being] cannot be properly understood, being thought of as manifold. Being inconceivable and more minute in size than the most minute, there is no access to Him unless one is taught by another [who truly knows Him].

Not by reasoning is this understanding attainable but, dearest, [only] when taught by another for deep knowledge. You have obtained it, steadfast to truth. May we find, Naciketas, an inquirer like you. (I.2.1–9)

The youth named Naciketas is a symbol for all serious aspirants tired of earthly goods and desiring to know the glorious Reality, the ultimate Being. Yama, God of Death, is a symbol for the spiritual teacher (guru), who spells the end of the aspirant’s self-centeredness and ordinary perception of the world. But just as death is merely a transformation from one level of existence to another, so the Lord of Death and all spiritual teachers after him are gateways to a new understanding and a new, sacred mode of life.

According to the anonymous author of the Katha-Upanishad (I.2.12), the wise individual leaves behind both joy and sorrow and realizes God (deva) in the cave of the heart through the agency of what is called adhyatma-yoga, the Yoga of the inmost self. This is the contemplation of the eternal Spirit, entailing the pacification of
the mind and the senses. Yet, paradoxically, the Spirit or Self cannot be realized by effort alone. As the *Katha-Upanishad* (1.2.23) states, it can be attained “only by the one whom it chooses.” In other words, there must be grace. The element of grace in the yogic process is emphasized by many other authorities, and it plays a leading role in Bhakti-Yoga, as first articulated in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

This sacred text is the most treasured Yoga scripture in India; Mahatma Gandhi reverently called it “My Mother.” It is embedded in the *Mahabharata* epic, one of India’s two great national epics (the other is the *Ramayana*, whose spirituality falls in the category of asceticism, or *tapas*). The *Mahabharata* is the story of the war between two ancient Indian tribes, the Kurus and the Pandavas. Its legendary author Vyasa weaves all kinds of spiritual teachings into his lengthy description of the events leading up to the war, the eighteen-day war itself, and the aftermath. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is such a teaching episode, which occurs on the morning of the first battle when Arjuna, one of the Pandava princes, refuses to fight because he has spotted teachers and friends among the ranks of the enemy. Krishna, the divine incarnation serving as his charioteer, encourages him to do his duty as a warrior in this just war, whose purpose is to reestablish the lawful kingdom and moral order. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is the dialogue ensuing between them.

Yogic teachings also are given in the *Moksha-Dharma* (Liberation Teaching) section of the twelfth book of the *Mahabharata*. Like the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, they have been characterized as Epic Yoga or Preclassical Yoga and belong to varying periods extending from about 500 BCE to perhaps 100 CE. During this span of time, many Upanishads containing yogic teachings were composed. The *Shvetashvatara-Upanishad* and the *Maitrayaniya-Upanishad* are especially significant.

The former work (I.3), whose curious name is apparently derived from the initiatory title of an unknown sage, speaks of the contemplative discipline (*dhyana-yoga*) by which the self-power of the hidden God is revealed. That God is called the Lord (*isha*) who supports the universe. The yogic discipline recommended involves meditative recitation of the sacred syllable *OM*—one of the most ancient practices of Yoga. Upon stilling the mind, the initiate may experience a number of internal visions. These are merely signposts and must not be confused with the ultimate goal of Self- or God-realization.

The yogic path is more systematically treated in the *Maitrayaniya-Upanishad*, which contains the following passage:
This is the rule for accomplishing this [spiritual work]: breath control, sense-withdrawal, meditation, concentration, inquiry (tarka), and ecstasy (samadhi) are said to be Yoga. When seeing by means of this he sees the gold-colored maker, the Lord, the Spirit, the source of Brahma, then the sage, abandoning good and evil, makes everything unitary in the supreme Indestructible. For thus it has been said: “As birds and deer do not occupy a burning mountain, so the defects (dosha) never occupy a knower of the Absolute (brahman).” (IV. 18)

Toward the end of this period in the evolution of Yoga or slightly later, perhaps around 200 CE, Classical Yoga emerged. It was codified by Patanjali in his famous Yoga-Sutra (Aphorisms of Yoga) and became the philosophical system of Yoga par excellence. Many Sanskrit commentaries have been written on this work, which consists of no more than 195 (or, in some editions, 196) terse aphorisms (sutra). The oldest and most valuable commentary, which is attributed to Vyasa (a name meaning “compiler”), is the Yoga-Bhashya (Speech on Yoga).

In addition to Classical Yoga, there were many other yogic schools in the period following Patanjali. Whereas Classical Yoga espoused a dualistic philosophy (distinguishing between spirit and matter), virtually all these other yogic schools subscribed to the nondualist (advaita) metaphysics that has been at home in India since ancient times. They are generally referred to as Postclassical Yoga.

These nondualist yogic teachings can be encountered, for instance, in the Puranas, encyclopedic compilations containing much religious and metaphysical information. Tradition speaks of eighteen major and as many minor Puranas, though their actual number is much higher, and each of these Sanskrit scriptures includes a more or less detailed treatment of the spiritual path. The best-known work of this genre is the Bhagavata-Purana, which contains the Krishna legends and much else besides. It was composed sometime in the tenth century CE. The name purana means “ancient” and points to the fact that the puranic heritage traces itself back to a very early age. A Purana is first mentioned in the Atharva-Veda (II.7.24), compiled some four thousand years ago, but the Puranic works known today are creations of a much later era.

A Purana-like tenth-century work is the beautifully imaginative and poetic Yoga-Vasishtha, comprising no fewer than 30,000 stanzas. This scripture promulgates nondualist Jnana-Yoga, which unfolds in seven stages. The highest stage of this Yoga is called