

FACULTÉ DE THÉOLOGIE ET D'ÉTUDES RELIGIEUSES

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**THE KINETIC QUEST OF ASHTANGA YOGA  
THROUGH THE LENS OF PILGRIMAGE:  
MAKING SENSE OF POST-MODERN QUESTING**

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## INTRODUCTION

From its ancient beginnings to its present day incarnation, *yoga* (from here forth *yoga*), as a spiritual practice, has undergone seismic sea-change. From its first documented introduction in sacred Indian texts thousands of years ago, and its reincarnation from East to West some less than a century and a half ago, it has nevertheless retained, for some, a residual spiritual element. Those who practise a very contemporary variety of modern postural *yoga* known as Ashtanga Vinyasa *Yoga* (Ashtanga), claim to have experienced, through their physical practice of *yoga*, a transformative, even transcendental/mystical awakening.

To be open to fully understanding the mental and physical discipline which constitutes *yoga* as it is practiced today in Western society, it is important, says the author of *A student's guide to the history and philosophy of yoga*, to grasp the differences in “worldview that make it different from its Western counterparts [...]. The Indian understanding of time, of human destiny and of the kinds of connections which exist between language, the physical world and the various realms within the physical world are all different from what is generally accepted in the West” (2007, p.15). Connolly asserts that this is a “vast, almost mind-blowing, cosmology” (p.16). Practitioners of physical, or postural *yoga*, describe, as we will later witness through some very revealing first-hand accounts, feeling a suspension of time and a break with the physical world; given the employment of the physical body as a vehicle for the experience of transformation, there is an interesting paradox which surfaces in this practice. The inhabited body becomes the vehicle, and through embodied motion, movement, ritualized kinetics and the focus on an end goal, the body, which is the necessary component for the experience, in its control and surrender to the human effort and energy directing it, is ultimately transcended.

Novitiates to the practice of *yoga*, says Ernest Wood, in whom there is a genuine desire to “mount”, or take up the practice, can be compared to the Christian mystic, he says, whereby “an awakening to the value, not merely the understanding, but to the enjoyment of the yogic life” (1959, p.14) leads him towards this path of transcendence. He describes this awakening as a discovery of the inner man: “everyone who makes the discovery identifies himself with the inner rather than the outer”. Similar recurring themes will be examined in the following exploration; the inner-outer synthesis, the aspect of physical performativity, and of physical and mental discipline and force,

even of pain; “pain has its use as an indicator of missing the way, and gives direction back into the path of happiness” (p.14), says Wood, as a quality of the yogic experience.

If the physical struggle is valued in Ashtanga, overcoming the body is the end goal of that very struggle. The ritualized postures are intended to be transformative; through a focusing of the mind and a stimulation of subtle energy: one’s eyes through gazing, one’s vital energy through breathing and invoking sacred sounds and movements all serves to enkindle a magical and therapeutic effect. This physical culture has as its core, the goal of a differentiated state, a transformation both physical and beyond physical.

In this study of Ashtanga we will be introduced to the sacred place of its inception less than a century ago, and the sacred persons with whom the practice has been most associated over the last half century. The lineage and heritage of the practice, and the perception of authenticity will be reconsidered, as will be the obvious commoditization of yoga as a salvation market which has largely obscured the core values of the practice to those unfamiliar with its history. The yogic journey as initiatory: as a breaking with the mundane, will be made an example of through the experience of Ashtangis who have made the pilgrimage to the outward sacred centre of their practice, in Mysore, India, and who have equally made the inward journey to the sacred centre of their practice: the Self. Delving just below the surface of some of the classical texts of yoga will demonstrate that such “parallelisms” between different worlds of the universe, external and internal, “what Mircea Eliade Called ‘homologies’, both between mental states and the levels of the cosmos and between worlds and things” (Connolly, 2007), are fundamental to the practice of yoga, yet conceptually foreign to most Westerners.

In interpreting the symbolic perspectives we come across tantric homologies: the body is interpreted as being in service to the spirit. There is an inner landscape to be discovered and named, and there are “seeds of spiritual union” which are both literal and metaphorical [...], the body empowered to climax in a union with an embodied other. This is a concept unfamiliar, and perhaps more accurately, largely incompatible with Western spiritual traditions. In yoga there is an element of the spiritual rooted in the physical; there is an internalisation of the symbols and of the signifiers, the mind, says Wood, responds to the inner purpose of life and learns a new obedience “well stated as ‘be still and know that I am God’ ” (1959).

How is it though, given that the foundations of yoga are so fundamentally distinct from those in Western society, that yoga continues to enjoy such resounding popularity? I will endeavour to demonstrate that there is indeed an angle through which the Ashtangi's practice makes perfect sense: an angle which Westerners have reserved for the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is a journey with intimate links to Western religions and religious practice, and which in its turn has become ever more popular as a religious and spiritual undertaking. For the reader who wishes to become more acquainted with the practice of yoga as a physical and embodied quest in search of the Self and of other, I will strive to interpret, through the most appropriate and useful lens of pilgrimage, the embodied journey of the Ashtanga yogi, the Ashtangi.

Through the lens of the pilgrimage, which has benefitted from extensive academic interest and research, we are afforded a wonderfully rich and varied theoretical landscape. The conversation between sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists on the subject of the pilgrim is a diverse exploration into the meaning and motivation in movement towards a goal of transformation. Through the lens of pilgrimage, from these three specific angles, the potential for the body to become the agent of the spirit makes credible sense. I will undertake the fascinating journey, in the following project, with the task of elucidating and extracting the points of convergence,



## CHAPTER 1: THE OBJECT

### 1.1 Introduction

*“The open minded Christian church, with which I identify, unknowingly abandoned it’s teachings on how to nourish and nurture the soul. The soul-that deep hidden, knowing sense within-is malnourished. We mistakenly thought that the intellect was the avenue to experience the Sacred, to nourishing the soul. We discounted the imagination and our other faculties of knowing mystery”* writes Dr. Lauren Artress in *Walking a sacred path* (1995, p.8).

In this chapter we will explore the genesis and foundations of ancient yoga, and the evolution toward what is largely understood in contemporary society as a physical ritual beginning with the goal of mastering the body. To go back, however, to yoga’s beginnings, from the viewpoint of some of the most well-known classical texts in which yoga is described, creates a context for a modern spirituality with a foundation which stands in stark contrast to Western traditions.

Hopefully, the brief survey of those texts and the interpretations they each make to yoga as a practice with varying features in evolution, will nevertheless paint a picture of a tradition which makes some assumptions with which Westerners may find themselves somewhat disoriented and bewildered. This foray should serve to edify the reader as to the vast and important history of yoga which precedes its contemporary incarnation, but which should not be divorced from it, any more than the contemporary practice of religious tourism and sacred travel should not be severed from the pilgrimage.

### 1.2 The beginnings: a brief history of ancient yoga

#### 1.2.1 Yoga as both ancient and timeless: the ancient texts

##### *The first records*

Measured chronologically in the realm of the more identifiable and tangible elements of the *adhibautika* (material world), historians made the remarkable discovery of yoga's existence as many as 4000 years ago. From the images of the Indus Valley "seals" and the discovery of an image in stone of someone in the meditative posture of the lotus position, to sacred (ancient Indian) *Vedic* text in which cosmic oneness is assumed and the practise of yoga is "described in the most

detail" (Connolly, 2007, p.33), we can place the birth of this evolving and enduring tradition that is yoga in Ancient India *circa* 2000 BC, or possibly even prior to the migration of the Aryans into the Indus Valley (p.43). Where and when yoga originated is not indisputable, although the *Upanisads*, a series of sacred Indian texts, *circa* 800-200 BC and written in Sanskrit, form the core of Hindu philosophy and teachings, and they present us with a “primarily cool and increasingly structured approach” to its history (p.46).

#### *Yoga's introduction in the Taittiriya Upanisads*

“It should be clear that the main objective of the *Upanisads* is not to propound a theory of creation or even to provide a metaphysics but to expound a teaching concerning the person (*Purusa*, *Atman* or *Brahman*) that had a long tradition even before the *Upanisads*” (Kulkarni, 1972, p.57). This teaching was presented in the *Upanisads Taittiriya*, one of the oldest primary texts in the collection of *Upanisads*, and was described as *yoga*. “The earliest mention of the term 'yoga' as a kind of spiritual practice in Indian religious literature [...] is a famous passage that presents the doctrine of the five persons or layers that make up the individual” (Connolly, 2007, p.36). The *Taittiriya* presents us with an introduction to the practice, which dealt with the seeming contradiction of *Brahman*. The *atman* is said to be “beyond all the conceivably known response-capabilities” yet we should nevertheless attempt to know the *atman* by and through the practise of yoga.

It is helpful to refer to this five-layered structure of the human anatomy, this five layers of “person within person” to appreciate that this *paravidya*, or superior (as opposed to inferior) knowledge which is believed to be required if one is to ever know the *atman*, resides in the very highest place next to “the person consisting of knowledge”. The five parts, which in turn make up this superior knowledge are faith, order, truth, firmness and yoga; “what is quite curious, and almost astounding, is that yoga should be considered as the essential substance of this next-to-innermost person” (Kulkarni, 1972, p.57).

#### *Yoga in the Katha Upanisads*

In the *Katha Upanisads*, also titled *Death as teacher*, another one of the primary Upanisadic texts and possibly the most widely known, is a repetition of the concept of yoga as a means of knowing the *atman*. This *atman* exists in what is described as a “monistic cosmology” (Connolly, 2007,

p.53) of microcosm of the macrocosm; the Self and *Brahman*, or the *atman*, being all one in the same thing. This communion is discovered through the cultivation of a superior knowledge, which is a necessary component of being released from the cycle of rebirth. Ignorance of the *atman* renews the life cycle for yet another opportunity at knowing. Yoga is defined as "the firm holding back of the senses" (p.37).

*When the five perceptions are stilled, together with the mind,  
And not even reason bestirs itself; they call it the highest state.  
When senses are firmly reigned in, that is Yoga, so people think.  
From distractions then a man is free,  
for Yoga is the coming-into-being, as well as the ceasing-to-be.  
(Olivelle, 2008, p.610)*

The image of the charioteer controlling horses is a familiar one, and this concept of yoking is discovered repeatedly over the course of centuries in association with the practise of yoga. Akin to metaphorical wild horses is the power of the senses and of mental conditioning; they are so strong that they require extreme discipline to reign in. "The yogi is one who, through the intellect and mind, brings the body and the senses under control" says Connolly (p.37), yet Kulkarni tells us this is not something exclusive to yogis, and that "yoga, as conceived by the *Upanisads*, is a psychological process that is basically involved in all perceptions and perceptual discriminations relative to man as a biological species" (Kulkarni, 1978, p.58). Thus the capacity to control and transcend is inclusive of all those with enduring discipline.

### *Yoga in the Maitri*

Distraction of the mind is the ultimate challenge: "different stages of mental concentration were being recognized" in the *Maitri* as a methodology for one's success in control (*Ibid.*). The *Maitri Upanisads*, the last of what is considered the principal *Upanisads*, and written at a much later date, presents us with new theories of yoga, and employs the familiar Indian format of a story being told within a story being told, the idea of layer upon layer, Guru to (typically) royal born one awakening, to impart wisdom to the seeker of spiritual enlightenment. In this case the story begins as a conversation, the sage to the king ruminating on the wisdom and uni-dimensionality of the divine *Brahman*. The distinguishing feature of the *Maitri*, however, is that the *atman* is no longer the same as the body. Knowledge of the *atman* is to be continued to be aspired to, although the *atman* takes on not only a new name but also a different definition: *ksetra-jna*, and is further

divided into the forms of breath (*prana*) and sun (*aditya*). “This is reminiscent of the (individual) *adhyatma*/ (cosmic) *ahidaivata* distinction found in a number of earlier *Upanisads*”. This distinction is an interesting development in the *Upanisads* of an integration of the increasingly popular *Sankyan* terminology and philosophy, a philosophy that distinguishes the 25 elements constituting man, mapping out the relationships between those gross and subtle and between the macrocosm and the microcosm as a means of attaining a higher state of consciousness (Connolly, 2007, p.55).

There is an evolution in the *Maitri* from the idea of yoking or reigning in the senses and becoming one with *Brahman* to redefining yoga as a renunciation of all becoming. The concept of *namarupa* and the symbiosis of breath and *Om* and *Brahman* is consolidated and merged. Ultimately, "the practice of yoga results in the experience of selflessness, which in turn, leads to the state of isolation or aloneness" (p.56), and is achieved through a codified 6-fold practice:

*pranayama* (breath control)  
*pratyahara* (sense withdrawal)  
*dhyana* (concentration)  
*dharana* (deeper concentration)  
*tarka* (contemplation)  
*samadhi* (absorption)

The conceptual physical manifestation of this practice can best be exemplified by the mendicant renunciant who withdraws from society to achieve his oneness with the divine *Brahman*, very literally giving up all sense indulgence in a complete removal of himself from his community; the almost starving yogi, clothed with little more than a loincloth and carrying only his frail body, seated lotus style or in a yet more challenging posture (*asana*) are the familiar images we have of him. The faithful, in their pursuit of spiritual ideals, live a life of tapas, or hardship.

### *Yoga in the Bhagavad Gita*

The importance of selflessness remains a constant throughout the history of yoga, even if the method of practise does not. The *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred text which follows the *Upanisads* ushers in, over a thousand years later, a different definition not only of the universe and the divine, but also of the practise required to achieve salvation. *Vedic* tradition is, for the purpose of simplification, essentially about a monistic oneness and sameness with *Brahman* who is everything

and nothing. The goal of yogic practise is to become one with God/*Brahman* and it is not a metaphysical experience. The Self and *Brahman* are one, while everything else is an illusion. In contrast, the lesson in the tale *the Bhagavad Gita* of that *Krishna* attempts to teach *Arjuna* (in the style once more of the story within a story; sage to a royal) is “a metaphysical rationale” (p.101) in which he confronts the *Vedic* tradition and redefines yoga.

*Krishna* integrates the philosophical perspective popular of that era with the practise of yoga, merging *Sankya* and yoga to give birth to the newly defined *Sankya-Yoga* as one and the same thing; he reveals to *Arjuna* that the philosophy and the practise are one. One is to be detached from the clutching, but one need not renounce the world and withdraw into the woods, so to speak, to achieve salvation. One must act, or perform yogic action while remaining detached from the fruit of one's actions. The action is the essence of the practise of *KarmaYoga*: a yoga that is about participating in the world as opposed to seeking solitude and isolation and withdrawing into the Self. It is very much an extroversive as opposed to individual and introversive endeavour.

"*KarmaYoga* is the attainment through unselfish work of that freedom which is the goal of all human nature. Every selfish action therefore, retards our reaching the goal, and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal; that is why the only definition that can be given of morality is this: that which is selfish is immoral, that which is unselfish is moral" (Vivekananda, 1948, p.176). Consider *Krishna's* condemnation of *Arjuna* when he expressed his desire to let his sword drop. The act of abandoning the work that lay ahead of him was tantamount to a complete betrayal of his Self, his community (or his caste) and his God. And the expectation of reward, perhaps the penultimate betrayal, *Krishna* tells *Arjuna*, is not to be entertained:

*Think not of gain or keeping the thing gained, but be thyself  
Work alone is thy proper business,  
Never the fruits (it may produce);  
Let not your motive be the fruit of work,  
Nor your attachment to (mere) worklessness (akarma).  
(Bhagavad Gita, p.216)*

*Krishna's* yoga is a physical and psychological subjugation and abandonment of the Self; his altruistic *KarmaYoga* can be further clarified as the willingness in any man to give themselves up at any time, even at the point of death, for another person" (Vivekananda, 1948).

Yoga practise yields different results in this new incarnation than it does in the *Vedic* tradition, and the individual whose practise is flawless achieves not a separation of his Self from nature, but rather a union of his Self with all beings (Connolly, 2007, p.102). *Krishna's* yoga is hierarchical and can be summed up as having at its foundation the goal of peace, achieved in order of expediency:

*karma-phala-tyaga* (abandonment of the fruit of actions)  
*dhyana* (meditation)  
*jnana* (knowledge)  
*abhyasa* (practise)

He says, “some by meditation (*dhyana*) come to behold the Self (*atman*) in the Self by the Self; others by the reason-method (*samkhya*) and others by the discipline of action (*Karma-Yoga*)” (p.103). Work, coupled with devotion to *Krishna* himself (*Bhakti-Yoga*) is the path to parinirvana. This is a very new concept as well; the idea of a God who helps control the chariot, of a God to whom one can turn. This yoga of outward seeking companionship through devotion to *Krishna* himself is another reflection of the abandonment of monism to embrace both living and action in one's quest for awakening. Liberation, through devotion and sacrifice allows for the waging of the battle of life.

### 1.2.2 Other classic yoga philosophies

#### *Yogasutra of Patanjali*

Dating sometime between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, “this brief text represents the earliest known systematic statement of the philosophical insights and practical psychology that define yoga”, says Barbara Stoler-Miller, (1996, p.1) who translates the 195 aphorisms which make up the practical philosophy of yoga as the “discipline of freedom” in the “classic text of mental and physical enlightenment” (cover). Patanjali does not reinvent yoga, he borrows from the broad system of physical and spiritual disciplines coined yoga from over the centuries; he does not present God as omnipotent, as *Krishna* appears to be in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Here God is an “object of concentration”, eternal and archetypal assisting the yogi with his absolute isolation from all worldly concerns. Patanjali's yoga is a discipline of detachment of one's spirit from the corrupting

influences of the outside world, and physical control is the condition of inner spiritual transcendence. The practical means to freedom consists of eight limbs (*Astanga-yoga*):

*Moral principles*  
*Observances*  
*Posture*  
*Breath control*  
*Withdrawal of the senses*  
*Concentration*  
*Meditation*  
*Pure contemplation*

For Patanjali, control of the body is the gateway to the interior and a necessary precondition; when effort no longer needs to be exerted in *asana*, only then can the mind “recognise the infinite” (p. 57). The tradition of *hathayoga* which followed built upon that premise.

*The posture of yoga is steady and easy.*  
*It is realised by relaxing one’s effort and resting like the cosmic serpent on the waters of infinity.*  
*Then one is unconstrained by opposing dualities.*  
*(Patanjali’s sutras #46-48, Miller, 1998, p.56)*

*Hathayoga: discipline of force*

Believed to have grown out of Patanjali, Hatha yoga is often attributed to the legendary Gorakhnath, who is believed to have written several Sanskrit texts on a yoga focusing on the perfection of the body as a means of spiritual liberation. The Nath cult, in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, may have influenced Gorakhnath; this cult developed their yoga in such a way as to put critical emphasis on the physical aspect. Author of *The lesser known Nath cult and its significant philosophy* Kanchi Vijay Srinath writes that what made this yoga unique was that “*mudras* (muscle locks also fundamental to modern Ashtanga yoga) or special exercises of bodily organs and (the) nervous system which found no mention in the yoga of Patanjali find prominent place in this system” (np). There are different *asana* and practises not before recorded on methods to clean the body of impurities in an effort to maintain a robust physical health. The first records of the sun salutation, a sequence of 12 *asanas* that resemble a pilgrim’s prostration (Singleton) come from Hatha texts (*Hatha yoga, Encyclopaedia Britannica*). This is the same salutation that forms the basis for the opening sequence in a modern Ashtanga yoga practise.

### *Yoga enduring*

The history of yoga is a continuous evolution that has blossomed anew in myriad magical incarnations and manifestations across space and time. It has been an endurance of the spirit both in the microcosm and the macrocosm, story within story and person within person, which has given meaning to life and a framework for living.

### **1.3 A brief overview of yoga in contemporary society**

“[...] *It would be fair to say that in the West and indeed, in much of modern India, a yoga class is generally understood to be concerned with physical movement, stretching and breathing first and with meditation, philosophy and spirituality only second*” (Connolly, p.205).

#### **1.3.1 Modern postural yoga**

##### *Hatha evolved*

In her published doctoral thesis *Modern yoga: Transmission of theory and practise* (2001) written while studying in the faculty of divinity at the University of Cambridge, Elizabeth De Michelis develops a typology which assists in differentiating the vastly different forms of yoga practised in contemporary society, and in which she distinguishes Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) from other types. Modern Meditational Yoga revolves primarily around secular meditations, Modern Denominational has at its heart some observance of doctrine and devotion to a neo-guru, or an avatar (a physical human manifestation of a divine being), and the final *idéal-type*, Modern Psychosomatic Yoga, is one based on the premise that Hatha yoga, the ancestor of all postural yoga, is not the path to spiritual growth nor is it an adequate practise for realise the goal of truth shared by all religions. So MPY is distinguished from other more seemingly spiritual types of modern yoga in part by what it seems to lack: doctrine, devotion, truth, and meditation. Through the lens of pilgrimage, however, we see the kinetic practise of *asana* as the starting point on a journey of transformation, journey in which the physical body recognises an agency over the spirit, and embodiment and movement create a resultant enlightenment in the yoga practitioner. The “Self” is experienced as unified and non-dual in nature, and the practise becomes an inner pilgrimage that for a notable number of practitioners can be conceived of as spiritual.



Contemporary conceptions of yoga, as it has been practised throughout Western society over the course of the last two decades, do indeed seem to emphasise the physical and postural aspect of this pursuit as being its most salient quality. A postural yoga class today may be held in an *ashram* (retreat), in a *shala* (yoga school), in a strip mall, a school gymnasium or gym studio to list of but a few of the more popular venues. Most often teacher led, a MPY class may take place just about wherever one may unfurl one's yoga mat. The emphasis is on working one's body into a posture, called an *asana*, and often holding it before moving on to another pose. In some cases the *asana* are randomly ordered and in others a more predictable sequence of postures is mapped out and followed. The level of difficulty is often partially determined by variations on the postures, and different classes will more often than not be described as being for the beginner or the advanced practitioner; and the class will often be outlined as being of a particular discipline or style. The categories are extremely diverse, necessitating a generous description in most cases. The only thing constant across the spectrum of classes is that they will involve *asana*.

#### *The physical practise: asana*

Practicing *asana*, or postures, is considered the realm of *hatha* yoga. The term *hatha* refers to the physical aspect of yoga practise. "The idea conveyed by the term *hatha* is that working on the physical body invigorates and directs or forces the vital energies in the body to awaken the creative power, or *askti*, who is regarded as being dormant and coiled at the base of the spine" (Connolly, 2007, p.195). But *hatha* is in fact only one aspect, one cog on the wheel of yoga practise which leads toward enlightenment. *Hatha* means 'force' a yoga of physical practises and lessons geared toward preparing the body for the higher spiritual journey of *raja* yoga: the yoga of Patanjali, which included the eight limbed path to enlightenment. Patanjali's *Yoga sutra* is at the heart of yoga, says Barbara Stoler-Miller, who, in her text *Yoga discipline and freedom* (1995) translated his 195 aphorisms that "define yoga as the ultimate mind-body discipline. Patanjali's brilliantly concise aphorisms outline step by step the means for breaking free of habitual ways of thinking and acting, transcending the conflicts and seductions of daily experience, and attaining true liberation" (back cover). And although *hatha* yoga is often the starting point for teachers and students of yoga alike, Patanjali's sutras underlie the teachings of most of those gurus who come from India.

Some examples of the diversity in the practise of MPY, and the influence of Patanjali, who “presents us with the possibility of complete psychological transformation” (p.ix) can be gleaned from the menu of yoga classes offered in the popular *Gold’s Gym* in Montréal’s West Island, which has expanded into the business of yoga classes from its original focus on free weights for bodybuilding and strength training ([http://www.ggsattva.com/index.php?page=class\\_schedule](http://www.ggsattva.com/index.php?page=class_schedule)):

*Kripalu & Meditation*: Is a form of Hatha Yoga using inner focus, meditation, standard yoga poses, breath work, development of a quiet mind and relaxation. Kripalu emphasises ‘following the flow’ of prana or life-forces energy, compassionate Self-acceptance, observing the activity of the mind without judgement, and taking what is learned into daily life.

*Athlete Yoga*: Emphasizing full range of motion, foundation and flexibility to get your game on. Improve your sport, whether you run, cycle, swim or golf. Lay a foundation of fitness for your sport and stay injury free. Audience: Type A's and early birds who want a jump-start their day with active yoga practise. It will attract more males, off season cyclists, runners and sport enthusiasts who want to enhance their game. Emphasize foundation and flexibility.

*Hot Flow (HOT Yoga)*: This journey on your mat will help set you free, free of karma that conditions your soul. Coordinating breath with movements in postures will guide you to your inner beach where waves of sweat will purify your body, heal your soul and bring you to the meditative state of no-mind. In Savasana every story will dissolve, ‘deconditioning’ happens and you meet your peaceful warrior within. ‘Respond to every call that excites your spirit.’- Rumi

*Hot Yin Yang Yoga*: Designed to offer the balancing effects of both passive and active yoga styles, this class will develop your strength, stamina and flexibility through the yang asana practise and then allow you to withdraw into stillness as you work through the yin postures. This combination will lead to a deep, integrated and satisfying practise.

*Warm Sattva Salut*: In this class, we open our bodies to the new day with an energising yet mindful yoga practise. This class focuses on restoring your body while using breathwork and meditation. You’ll leave class feeling refreshed and centred, ready to start your day!

The relationship of physical well-being to one’s sense of peace and spiritual freedom can be witnessed in these class descriptions in the many encouragements made to participate in yoga classes. This gym has as its mission: “to inspire our members with unrivalled energy and to provide the finest equipment and fitness knowledge available to help our members achieve their individual potential”. The web site encourages: “start yoga to feel fitter and flexible, be more energetic, happier, and peaceful”. Yoga’s commercialism and popularity is exemplified by the

example *Gold's Gym* makes of MPY: it is a pursuit which, class descriptions would lead one to believe, has the potential to bring about spiritual change. The first Gold's Gym was made popular in the 1960's and 1970's through its association with bodybuilding champions (Arnold Schwarzenegger being the most notable) and today they have over 650 gyms worldwide. Yoga is yet another means of acquiring a beautifully muscled and toned physique, yet it is sold to consumers in these examples through the offering of something more than physical fitness. It has the potential to "restore" and "centre" an individual and to allow one to "retreat into stillness" as one works through the postures. It can lead to "compassionate self-acceptance, observing the activity of the mind without judgment" while concomitantly potentially assisting in the improvement of one's athletic strength and physical beauty.

*Asana: the kinetic vehicle*

Suzanne Newcombe, in her article *The development of modern yoga* (2009), suggests that what is today understood as yoga is vastly different in this modern period, and describes a "relatively nascent field of 'modern yoga studies' in which academics attempt to untangle a "contextual web" (p.7). She observes a growing body of academics who are also exploring yoga for both personal and professional reasons, and recognises the potential for some interesting perspectives this development creates; more and more research is being undertaken by scholar practitioners who offer invaluable insight into better understanding the experiences of those who have a MPY practise and with it a valuable body of evidence attesting to MPY's capacity to bring about a spiritual experience. Singleton and Byrne explore this phenomenon in their collection of nine essays in *Yoga in the modern world: contemporary perspectives* (2008) as does Siguier-Saune in *La mémoire et le souffle* (2008), a specifically Christian perspective of the practise of postural yoga as a transformative experience. What is interesting is the documented compatibility of a postural yoga with a seemingly unrelated faith system: postural yoga as a kinetic vehicle to the deepening of one's spirituality or beliefs, whatever they might be.

Modern postural yoga, however removed it may be from its roots as it is carried out in contemporary society, nevertheless speaks of an ancient oriental tradition; while its authenticity has been challenged, yoga mysteriously remains for some a legitimate path of transformation. If modernity is characterised by scientific rationalism and empiricism, a concern with health and the

corporeal and a preference for auto-validatory questing toward the “god within”, then MPY has become the embodiment of modern values as in turn embodiment has become the concomitant physical journey for some contemporary yoga practitioners. One of the contributors to Siguiers-Saune (2008) makes reference to Hindu sage and Christian mystic Henri le Saux, quoting him: “the path to the Self, to the centre of one’s heart, is where one discovers oneself and in turn, God” (cited in French, p.182). Through yoga, this contributor claims that a pilgrim was made of her, and that yoga provided her with the tools necessary for the transformation which she experienced through her physical asana; her spine, a tree of life rooted to the earth through her hands and feet and her arms branches: revealing to her both her terrestrial and divine roots (p.179).

### *Mind-body synthesis*

Joseph Alter, who has written extensively on the subject of modern yoga and author of *Yoga in the modern world* (2008), suggests that “one can argue that yoga in general and postural yoga in particular exhibits a distinct mind-body synthesis” (p.37); yet he raises the issue of meaning, arguing that “it is impossible to draw a line above which all forms of practise are ‘legitimate’ and below which they are not” (p.47). Better yet is to observe how yoga is performed rather than debate its authenticity, for through performance are we most likely to be able to take seriously interpretations of meaning.

Yet meaning, and personal interpretations of meaning are arguably difficult to measure. The very fact that many practitioners of postural yoga purposely choose neutral words to describe what for all intents appears to qualify as a spiritual and transformative experience through this mind-body synthesis, make the meaning in the performance of yoga a challenge to both define and measure. Nick Rosen, subject of the documentary film *Enlighten up* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKQw0-IIJiY>), is challenged by the filmmaker to undertake any practise of MPY “seriously”; the filmmaker’s hypothesis being that if Rosen were to do so, “transformation” would prove inevitable. He welcomes the challenge of transformation, which he denies categorically as a religious quest instead claiming: “what would really matter is if it gave me something else”. His search for “something else” takes him to Mysore Palace, the home of Ashtanga in the South of India. Here Rosen practises his postural yoga amid pilgrims making the journey to the homeland of their practise of Ashtanga and students seeking a more authentic

connection to Ashtanga by moving themselves closer to its source.

Rosen is a typical example of the contemporary reaction to the modern secularisation of spirituality and the relationship that many Westerners, seekers of transformation, have with the language of spiritual meaning. This urban New York twentysomething claims emphatically not to be looking for religion *per se*, but he is willing to travel to India and “twist” himself “up into a pretzel” in postures if it means finding “something else” transformative. There is the blurring of lines between Rosen’s pilgrimage to Mysore as a seeker of something he cannot qualify as transformative and his journey across the world as a religious traveller; religiously loaded terminology that is seemingly rejected on the basis of the history it summons up. He is seeking, exploring and travelling for something he is incapable of verbally defining. And he is being challenged to do so through the practise of postural asana yoga that the director is attempting to prove as transformative. Yet he becomes a pilgrim himself by myriad definitions: he feels compelled to make a journey both within and without to realise his transformation.

#### *Performance as vernacular*

Secular MPY practitioners will purposely choose words for this visceral knowing which reflect a modern rejection of religious idiom. Secular practitioners will often use secular vernacular, scholar of religion Hasselle Newcombe in her survey *Spirituality and ‘mystical religion’ in contemporary society: A case study of British practitioners of the Iyengar method of yoga*. (2005) demonstrates. Some of those she surveyed said of their practise: meaning, purpose, underpins (me), grounds (life), brings sanity and provides identity as opposed to claiming the experience as religious. By Durkheim’s standards this sense of meaning can be equated with a religious experience if it gives meaning to life. Modern questing is described in modern terms and although this proves a challenge to measure by traditional standards, “meaning” can certainly be evidenced in many of those serious about their postural asana practise. Modern postural yoga has had a transformative effect for some, and for a significant proportion of those who acknowledge that effect; the experience is described as a *liminal* one in which the sacred is glimpsed at in a sort of mystical union. Pattabhi Jois, one of the original teachers and gurus of Ashtanga yoga, in his guide book for Ashtangi aspirants *Yoga mala: the seminal treatise and guide from the living master of Ashtanga yoga* (2010) describes the experience as such: “hence an aspirant by the grace of his

Guru and constant practise of his yoga, can someday realise, before casting off his mortal coil, the Indweller that is of the nature of supreme peace and eternal bliss [...]” (p.5). “Yoga practise has always begun at the grossest level –the body– and progressively included the mind, the senses, the intellect, and the spirit” (Sparrowe, 2004, p.60). This experience of meaning in performativity qualifies MPY as a variety of spirituality which steps beyond duality; it is by virtue of the body, and through mastery of it that one’s “spirit” is enriched.

Danny Paradise is a student of MPY Ashtanga yoga, one of the myriad varieties of yoga in the marketplace today. He went to India in the 1970’s and visited the birthplace of his practise, the palace of Mysore, and since then he has continued, he claims, to be a student and a teacher both of Ashtanga yoga. He claims that Ashtanga is a deep and inner “healing work at play, a constant process in which revelations occur”. He observes the feeling, he says, of being “more awake and alive” each time he practises and he describes this experience as being “a constant evolutionary process [...] a constantly expanding focus in which things are constantly being revealed: intuition improves, perception, insight, ways of seeing, wisdom through age [...]”. Indeed, he asserts: “It is a constantly expanding exploration, that’s what’s being revealed” and that “you can create your life as you want: explore freedom and overcome fear” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOh6UQRCT0U>).

### **1.3.2 An introduction to the practice of Ashtanga**

*“Here then we have the kernel of a truly modern yoga: available to all regardless of age, sex, nationality and social status; emphasising health and well-being; grounded in physical practise (asana, pranayama etc.) yet drawing inspiration from ancient yoga texts that focus on meditation and spirituality”* (Connolly, 2007. p.209).

#### *Valuing the physical and the physical struggle*

One of the better-known schools of MPY is this practise known as Ashtanga. Peter Connolly, in *A student’s guide to the history and philosophy of yoga* (2007) says of the tradition of Ashtanga that it is both meditational and postural and that the practise is firmly rooted in Indian traditions. He observes that the influence this form of modern yoga has had on the West is considerable.

Many high-profile Hollywood celebrities practise Ashtanga and this has certainly served to

increase its popularity as well as reinforce the physical aspect of the practise as being nothing short of body beautifying. Those first students of the great teacher of Ashtanga, Pattabhi Jois, who travelled to the seat of its modern incarnation in Mysore India, have also in their own right become somewhat renowned. What makes this school of yoga palatable to many of those who practise it is certainly the resultant effects of strength, flexibility and form but also the ritual: a sequence of movements was developed and mapped out by one of the founding fathers of this practise and for those with a ‘traditional’ Ashtanga yoga practise, the sequence is followed ritualistically and more often than not, ‘religiously’. It is the type of strictly adhered to *vinyasa* yoga: ordered flowing yoga. Given the demanding physical nature of the practise it has become somewhat synonymous with the term ‘power yoga’ for it is considered, when practised without any modifications to the ‘original’ postures or their ‘original’ order, to be extremely athletically challenging.

*The ritual: maintaining an “authentic” practise*

There is a process of “authentic” certification for those with the desire to become accredited in the method and tradition of this practise, and it is only through Pattabhi Jois’ Mysore school that such accreditation and certification can be obtained. The teachers he qualifies receive the privilege only after months and even years of training under him (or now his grandson and daughter) at the institute (*KPJAYI*). The practise, as it is taught at the *KPJAYI*, is considered to be the original method of Ashtanga and includes knowing the Sanskrit *mantras*, the Sanskrit names of each and every *asana*, remembering the sequence of *asanas* in each of the series of postures: “[...] the series can be chanted move by move, breath by breath in Sanskrit. It’s an exact formula which goes back thousands of years and has been time tested to be the most efficient way that one can get themselves fit” (Donahaye and Stern, 2010, p.20). Underpinning the postures are the core beliefs that a steady *ujjayi* breath must accompany the asana, that muscular locks and seals (*bandhas* and *mudras*) which connect the breath and movement must be engaged, and that one should maintain a steady focus point with one’s gaze known as *drishti*. None of these fundamentals is unique to the practise of Ashtanga alone, however the ritual and combined emphasis on these elements of yoga practise do differentiate Ashtanga from other forms of modern postural practise.

Timing of the postures must be aligned with the breath; movement is measured in breaths and is often crucial to being able to move into and hold asanas. The *ujjayi* breath means victorious breath

and it consists of narrowing the air passages in the throat to direct the flow of the breath into certain areas of the body depending upon the specific asana. Breathing in this manner creates a rather noisy and almost hypnotic aural rhythm to one's practise and is believed to have mental benefits as well as the physical benefits of warming up the body in preparation for the stretching. The *ujjayi* breath is what transforms what would otherwise resemble a series of gymnastics postures into ashtanga yoga, which promises to reward the serious practitioner with more than unidimensional physical exercise (Jois, 2010).

*Stimulating subtle energy: muscle locks*

In Ashtanga yoga three *bandhas* are recognised. These are muscle locks that are intended to increase one's physical control and strength but they are also intended to stimulate one's "subtle" energy. The engagement of these three locks throughout one's practise, the perineal lock (*mula bandha*), the abdominal lock (*uddiyana bandha*) and the throat lock (*jalandhara bandha*), coupled with the *ujjayi* breath is believed to increase the heat in one's physical body as the breath moves in and out, eliciting with it a "fire" or *Agni* at the centre of one's body. The effects of this heat are also believed to assist in both a physical detoxification of the body promoting the relief of emotional and mental blockages through stimulation of the central nervous system. This heat is believed to allow for a stilling of the mind. For Eddie Stern, another student turned Western teacher, under the important Indian guru Jois, the balance of spiritual and physical is what makes yoga different from other physical pursuits: "In yoga it is spiritual and physical, you have to keep both those things going simultaneously otherwise, if you lose the spiritual you become only physical, and then you become only concerned with the needs and the desires of the physical body [...] so infuse that with some deeper purpose and all of a sudden you have a stronger body so you can do good things in the world" (as cited in electronic resources).

*Focusing the mind: the gaze, the breath, the chant*

"How can we make the mind pointed so that we see the Universal Self? This is what Ashtanga yoga teaches" (Jois, 2010, p.6). Through the *drishti*, or gazing point, one achieves a focus and concentration. *Drishti* can also mean the direction of one's thoughts or even intelligence. It is again a discipline of focussing both eyes and mind which theoretically attempts to bring about transformative experience In an Ashtanga practise it is traditional to recite, in Sanskrit, an opening



and closing mantra. In a led class this is done in unison and is a ritual that begins and ends with the chant of *Om*, whereby each practitioner fills his lungs to full capacity and slowly exhales while pronouncing the sound at a steady and constant pitch. As each *Om* is delivered at a different pitch the concordant symphony of *Om*'s is said traditionally to be the sound of the universe and believed to be capable alone of bringing about spiritual transcendence. Together, as a combined effort amongst the practitioners, the deep vibrations have the potential to resound, in some, in a quite powerfully moving spiritual way. “Om. To calm the delirium caused by the poison of *samsara*, I venerate the lotus feet of the Masters, which awaken the joy of witnessing the Self. They are the very best doctors of poison” (beginning of the opening mantra in Ashtanga practise).

#### *Overcoming the physical body*

David Williams learned Ashtanga from Jois, in Mysore in 1973, and opened the first Ashtanga yoga school in the US. He believes Ashtanga is different from other practises in the way that there is nothing random about it, and that it is the order of the sequence that acts something like a “combination lock”: “If you do the yoga practise in a certain order, your body and your mind open up” (Donahaye and Stern, 2010, p.20). When he teaches he does so encouraging his students, like Jois, to follow the tradition and teach the “real” Ashtanga, the “authentic” Ashtanga. He also believes that the real strength of the Ashtanga practise comes from what you don't see; the inner work is at the heart of the practise. Yoga and meditation, he says, are synonymous, and he reiterates Jois' conviction that if you simply do the practise, religiously and wholeheartedly, all will be revealed” (p.21). “To me that's the spiritual part of having the revelations: by first getting the body fit enough so that it won't interrupt you, so you can get into a state of meditation” (p.21).

### **1.3.3 The tradition of Ashtanga**

#### *Sacred place*

One hundred and forty miles from the Indian city of Bangalore, renowned for its offshore development of computer software and the wealth of international investment, lies the city of Mysore, known amongst the Indians as a base point for the Jain Pilgrimage to Shraavanabelagola and home itself to myriad Hindu temples and the spectacular Mysore palace. In the early 1900's, it was, due in part largely to the efforts of the Maharaja, that Mysore was transformed into “a pan-

Indian hub of physical culture revivalism” (Singleton, 2010, p.177). More recently, it has also become a pilgrimage site for thousands of Western Ashtanga yoga practitioners who until only a few short years ago in 2009, might have been granted the privilege of a one on one encounter with Patthabbi Jois before his death at the age of 94; he was the most renowned representative of “authentic” Ashtanga yoga and guru to tens of thousands of Ashtanga practitioners ([http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Renowned Indian yoga guru Pattabhi Jois dies-a01611875512](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Renowned+Indian+yoga+guru+Pattabhi+Jois+dies-a01611875512)).

### *Sacred person*

Jois was the second guru ever to be offered a position by the Maharaja living at the Jaganmohan Palace in Mysore to teach Ashtanga to students, and he was by far the longest standing and most followed of the Jaganmohan Palace style Ashtanga gurus. It is believed that his visit to the US, (at the behest of one of his first Western students in the early 70’s, David Williams) palpably set in motion what has become an increasingly popular form of modern yoga amongst Westerners. But before that momentous occasion when Ashtanga’s beloved *Guruji* set foot on American soil and created the transnational phenomenon known as Mysore style yoga, this was a practise for Indian upper caste boys which had only been practised formally in the palace from 1924.

### *Prioritizing physical culture*

The Maharaja of Mysore, who began his rule in 1902, was a proud supporter of physical culture both foreign and indigenous, and his interest in culturists and gymnastics, military exercises and Western sporting games was the impetus for his promotion of physical culture experiments fusing Indian tradition and Western physical culture. His enthusiasm that the royal Mysore boys be given the opportunity for developing their physical capacities led to his taking on a new instructor at the palace boy’s school who would become appointed to teach “the yogic system of exercises to the prince [...]. The vital point here is that physical culture in Mysore during the 1920’s and 1930’s was based on a spirit of radical fusion and innovation promulgated by the Maharaja and in which *yogasana* played a major role” (Singleton, 2010, p.179).

### *Creating “authenticity”*

Mysore palace’s original teacher of this athletic style of *yogasana* was an Indian by the name of Krishnamacharya who, after extensive studies of yoga and a stint of over seven years under the

tutelage of a Himalayan yogin, was offered a job at the palace and given the gymnastics hall in which to set up a *yogashala*. The story is that the innovative Krishnamacharya had learned the system from the Himalayan guru based on a five thousand year old text called the *Yoga Kurunta*, subsequently eaten by ants in the Calcutta library and never to have been found. Also informing his teaching was another text which was never located; Krishnamacharya, at the age of sixteen, had a visionary experience in which the great sage and author of *Yoga Rahasya*, a text on the secrets and essence of yoga, was revealed to him and which he subsequently committed to memory.

Connolly (2007) describes some of these teachings as being radically different from any other historical form of yoga, and posits that many of the principles of movement and breathing cannot be traced back to any prior texts other than those Krishnamacharya himself quotes verbally but cannot provide; therefore raising the likelihood that the text was manufactured by Krishnamacharya himself. From the *Kurunta* originated three different series of postures: the *Primary Series* which is considered “yoga therapy”, the *Intermediate Series* which is “channel cleansing”, and the *Advanced Series* which is called “divine stability”. There are never before heard of *asana* which resemble gymnastics and wrestling moves popular in the era and which have become hallmarks of a modern postural yoga: the headstand and the vinyasas, a few of the most obvious. Each of these postures is connected by counterposes of forward bending, back bending and balancing *asana*, and is considered by even the most adept to be incredibly physically challenging.

But if authenticity resides in Krishnamacharya’s ability to back up his Ashtanga with historical evidence, he has done so without anybody being able to confirm his sources. However this is the yoga which Jois, as his student, strictly adhered to and has popularised and is now widely considered to be the authentic Ashtanga practise (Jois, 2010). In 1948, with the contributions of his students, the guru Jois set up the *Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga Research Institute* in his home with the aim of further exploring the “curative aspects” of this practise taught him based on the *Kurunta*. It was a humble abode of only two rooms, but in 1964 the home was extended to include a yoga hall. Around the same time a European named André van Lysbeth became a student of Jois’, and with his ability to understand Sanskrit was able to communicate with Jois and document the system of *asana* in a book he soon thereafter published, called *Pranayama*. This marked the beginning

of Western yoga students to Mysore in search of Jois and his *yogashala*. What is interesting to note is that according to a student of Jois in the 1960's it was only with the arrival of American students in the 70's that what was simply referred to as *asana* by Krishnamacharya was given the name of Ashtanga (Singleton, 2010). And Ashtanga, which means "consisting of eight parts", was taught to Western Ashtanga pilgrims not exclusively as a *hatha* practise, but as something more comprehensive. Singleton, in *Yoga body: The origins of modern posture practise*, considers the explosion of postural yoga as a "revival of physical culture" (2010, p.176) and contends that "this system, which was to become the basis of so many forms of contemporary athletic yoga, is a synthesis of several extant methods of physical training that (prior to this method) would have fallen well outside any definition of yoga" (p.177). But it is this form of yoga that has become a "mainstay", he says, of modern postural yoga.

#### *Therapeutic value and "magical" effects*

Nevertheless, on a "deeper level", this athletic yoga may have the potential to affect the neuroendocrine system and in turn relieve anxiety, depression and grief. "Deeper still, a consistent yoga practise of *asana* and *pranayama* helps open up the psychoenergetic channels yogis call *chakras* and activate the *nadis*, which circulate life sustaining *prana* throughout the body. The cosmic energy of *prana* releases pent-up emotions and brings joy and calm to the body and mind. The yogi then realises her own divinity". Sparrowe describes this realisation as one in which the yogi's consciousness is expanded and consummated by a union of the individual Self with the universal Self. She claims that *asana* can impact the individual in such a way that, aside from the physical body, the physiological, emotional, intellectual and spiritual (bliss) bodies are necessarily and concordantly affected. "Even if students practise yoga purely for its physical benefits, doing the postures over and over again can have a magical effect outside of yoga class" (Sparrowe, 2004, p.59).

Jois himself seems to echo this theory, and he writes in the preface to his own text *Yoga Mala* (2010) that his desire that the entire human community achieve the happiness that results from a regular yoga practise is the motivation for him to write his book, as a guide and aide toward the spiritual, physical and mental well-being that remains within reach of those who practise without fail. "Our minds will flood toward the Self" he reassures (p.xxi). Sarbacker, author of *The*

*numinous and cessative in modern yoga*, suggests that although Ashtanga yoga is an interweaving of Hindu and Western intellectual and bodily discourses both historical and contemporary, and is presented as secular and non-denominational, it nonetheless exhibits a degree of orthodoxy “rooted in part on the principles of the ‘Hindu Renaissance’ and the formulation of Hinduism under the rubric of an all embracing universalism” (Singleton & Byrne, 2008, p.161). The teleology of the tradition is one that concerns itself with the mundane aspects of health, beauty and fitness, but also with the spiritual: “knowledge of the nature of reality and liberation from worldly attachments and afflictions”.

### *Mind-body discipline*

Indeed the name given to Mysore asana: Ashtanga, makes reference to the eightfold path, or eight limbs of yogic practise outlined by Patanjali, author of the Yoga Sutras: “the earliest known statement of the philosophical and psychological insights that define yoga as the ultimate mind-body discipline” (Stoler-Miller, 1995). Patanjali’s ashtanga, or eight limbs of practise are: *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*, in english they are moral principles, observances, posture, withdrawal of the senses, concentration, meditation, and pure contemplation. And Jois’ Ashtanga, although it begins with *asana*, also attempts to honour its namesake. Indeed, Jois himself in a film documentary (*Enlighten up*, cited in electronic resources) responds to a query from his interviewer as to whether or not the interviewer himself stands to benefit from the practise when he doesn't consider himself spiritual. Why not? responds Jois. He lists off the eight limbs to the interviewer, and concludes with the encouragement to practise and practise more, then “all is coming!”

### *Montreal’s ashtangi elite: canada’s exclusively accredited couple*

In 1979 an aspiring yoga student left Australia for Mysore and spent 4 years under the tutelage of Jois. Mark Darby today has a *shala* he runs with his wife Joanne, whom he met in Mysore and where they had their son Shankara, and today all three of them teach the benefits of the Ashtanga yoga practise in their studios in downtown Montreal. Darby is one of the few teachers worldwide who has attained the highest level of Ashtanga Yoga teaching accreditation and is certified by Pattabhi Jois to teach the original Ashtanga method. He runs a teacher certification program for aspiring Ashtanga teachers and it is interesting to note what he outlines as the focus of the year

long training program. From his website (<http://sattvayogashala.com/index.html>) one reads the course content:

*Yogic Philosophy* - as the basis or inspiration to your approach.

*Breath & Vinyasa* - Learning the mechanism of breath and its effect on the physical body, on the emotional body, and on the mental body.

*Bandha & posture* - Optimizing and understanding *bandhas* and their effect on one's body. Bringing this understanding to the various asanas with a clear purpose of circulating the energy flow in the body.

*Drishti* - Bringing the state of mind that makes yoga a transformative process.

*Nutrition/ Ayurveda* - Mixing ancient and modern views on this subject.

*Anatomy* - Learning very specific anatomy that goes along with the course content. Basic anatomy will be part of the suggested readings. (Guest speaker)

*Esoteric anatomy* - to understand how this practise operates beyond the physical body.

*Chanting* - Learning basic mantras

*Pranayama* - Developing a pranayama practise that is suitable for each individual. Learn techniques that will energise your inner awareness and enhance your lifestyle in a positive way.

*Meditation* - Bringing a meditative state to all our practises, various approaches will be explored.

The second aspect of the training will involve gaining the confidence and developing the skills that will allow you to transmit your own experience through:

- Using words to give concise & progressive verbal instruction
- Adjustments, both safe and clear
- Reading into the postural and energetic imbalances of the students

### *Firsthand experience*

Having enjoyed the experience personally of being trained by Darby and Joanne, I was able to experience their approach to "Yoga Philosophy" as they outlined it to their students. Patanjali was made reference to, the eight limbs were outlined and explored, and one was permitted some insight to their practise of Ashtanga as far more comprehensive and rich than *asana* alone. They are

spiritual people in that they revered not only their guru Jois, whose photographs grace the walls of their shala, but they mentioned also believing in a divine power, the avatar of which happened to be for them a Hindu god. This informed their practise of Ashtanga.

*Jois' other certified protégées*

Eddie Stern, another one of Jois' most senior accredited Ashtanga teachers, opened a studio in New York City that he claims, on his website, was done so as the Western branch of the Mysore *shala* with Jois' blessings. "As in his (Jois') school in India, traditional yoga is practised on a daily basis as part of the yogic path –a path which includes personal and social ethical observances, meditation, and study of philosophy" (<http://ayny.org/about>) encapsulated by Patanjali's aphorism *Yogah cittavrtti nirodhah*, which translates to yoga as mind-turning cessation. This, the website explains, is also called "Ashtanga Yoga": the yoga of "eightfold factors" which form the basis of the practise of Ashtanga. These eight factors can be broken down into external and internal practise: "Restraint, observance, posture and breathing practise belong to the external devices. Sense-control, concentration, meditation, and contemplation belong to the internal ones". And because it is only possible to practise the internal once the external has been conquered, *asana* is the gateway, so to speak, into the practise of Ashtanga.

"(Ashtanga) yoga is a process of moving the mind inward: from being concerned about what other people are doing, or how limited your body is, to an internal exploration of the body and beyond". This is how Jois' son Sharath, who continues his father's commitment to teach the Mysore Ashtanga tradition since his recent death, also sees the practise of Ashtanga: "asana is not yoga. But asana is the foundation for our spiritual practise" (<http://www.accessyoga.net/ashtanga/archives/category/teachers/sharath-jois>). Another of Jois 40 worldwide-accredited teachers, Guy Donahaye, who published, with Eddie Stern, the aforementioned collection of interviews of his students, also teaches and continues to practise the "authentic" Mysore method. He claims, on the website for his Manhattan Ashtanga *shala*, that he "found in yoga a deeply therapeutic tool, which facilitates spiritual evolution through healing body and mind" (<http://aysnyc.org>).

#### 1.4 Partial conclusion

Ancient yoga examined hermeneutically shows a tradition in evolution; as a discipline of enlightenment with its goal the union of soul and cosmos, released from the practical concerns of the mundane. Although this was never conceived of traditionally as being based on the single aspect of yoga *asana*, yoga has nevertheless evolved in contemporary society as a primarily posture based practise in which the mind and body work together in unison to achieve a different state of consciousness.

*Hatha* yoga is the bridge between ancient and contemporary conceptions of yoga as a discipline of force, as a kinetic vehicle synthesising the mind and body while also working at overcoming it. The physical struggle becomes a rite of passage of sorts in the practise of contemporary Ashtanga vinyasa yoga; ritualised performativity becomes a means of maintaining an “authentic” practise, while stimulating subtle energy and focussing the mind through the breath, the gaze and the chant. The tradition of Ashtanga has sacred place and sacred person, therapeutic and “magical” effects, and is a physical culture and a physical journey where movement becomes meaningful.

Ashtanga would seem, to those who have truly embraced the practise, a spiritual journey that begins with movement. *Asana* is a progressive physical journey which can indeed bring about a paradoxical transcendence of the body. Intentionally or not, the practise becomes a pilgrimage of sorts. Bente Nicolaisen, in the anthropological exploration: *Embedded motion: sacred travel among mevlevi dervishes* in Coleman and Eade’s seminal *Reframing Pilgrimage* (2004), posits that “the objectives of reframing pilgrimage should be directed towards how mobility is constitutive of social practises and how embodiment serves to shape new experiences, so that pilgrimage is recreated” (p.103). In the next chapter of this study of Ashtanga yoga, I will attempt to demonstrate how mobility very much constitutes the practise, through the kinetic action of *asana*, through the embodiment which is seen as internal pilgrimage, and through the traditional concept of pilgrimage as a physical journeying toward a sacred centre beyond.



## CHAPTER 2: THE PHENOMENON: EXPLORING THE ANGLES

### 2.1 Introduction

Pilgrimage is an integral aspect of the tradition of yoga. The internal pilgrimage, the journey within one's physical body to make contact with the divine, is very much a part of the yogic tradition, and not in the metaphorical sense that a Westerner might interpret it as being. The inner yogic pilgrimage is a pilgrimage into one's physical body, where the outer cosmos is internalised. Westerners might conceptualise of an internal pilgrimage differently, left as we have been with the legacy of a discordant dualism between body and mind. The Eastern yogic tradition enjoys an entirely different perspective of the relationship of the body to the mind as quoted in Sarah York's *Pilgrim heart* (2001, p.98) "here in this body are the sacred rivers: here are the sun and moon, as well as all the pilgrimage places. I have not encountered another temple as blissful as my own body".

There are indeed multiple layers of yogic journey, made more interesting by the journey of Ashtanga yoga practitioners (Ashtangis), as they make what might be conceived of as an inner pilgrimage. Many of those who consider themselves devout in their practise also make the journey to the outer sacred centre: home to their practise and the guru Pattabhi Jois (and today, his grandson) who is made revered, if not sacred, as the contemporary forefather of the practise. In this chapter we will explore the intersection of journeying: of the Ashtangi outward, to Mysore, the sacred centre, where there is both heritage and a lineage in a breaking with the mundane, where the market for salvation goods thrives and authenticity is valued. The journey inward is examined from the perspective of the Ashtangi: his body as initiatory agency in reaching the exclusive and elusive destination of his practise in a testing and transcending of physical limits.

We shall survey, in turn, transcendent embodiment from an academic and historical perspective both, attempting to shed light on the popularity of yoga as an embodied experience. Myriad themes, such as the body as a vehicle and guide for the recreation of identity and as a site for religious expression, the paradox of embodiment, ritual as an agent for the subjective experience and the binary duality of Western body and spirit contrasted with the harmonious "single reality" that yoga presupposes. The symbolic perspectives evidenced in the tantric homologies, where the body is in service to the divine, elicits themes of inner landscape, internalised symbols and

signifiers, spiritual living which is rooted in the physical, the yogic “place” and crossing points, and a few of the traditional yogic correspondences which mimic those in contemporary practise of Ashtanga.

## **2.2 The yogic pilgrimage to the sacred centre**

### **2.2.1 Exploring the outward pilgrimage to Mysore**

#### *Journey to the sacred centre*

Mark Darby and his wife Joanne are the only two certified by Pattabhi Jois himself in the original Ashtanga method throughout Canada. They made visits to India a part of their practise, in which to spend a few months a year with the master Jois in Mysore. Many teachers of Ashtanga make a journey to the “sacred centre” of their Ashtanga yoga practise. For seventy years and until his death in 2009, thousands of Ashtanga practitioners would arrive in Mysore by any number of means, and literally prostrate themselves at the (lotus) feet of their guru Jois. In his place now are his daughter and grandson who oversee the running of the Institute. Indeed the website makes clear the imperative for each and every accredited and certified teacher: “teachers that are listed on this website are experienced practitioners and dedicated students who have shown a considerable degree of proficiency and appreciation of Ashtanga yoga in its traditional form and who continue to study regularly at the KPJAYI (K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute)”. Continued study necessitates in this case return visits on a consistent basis.

Kino MacGregor is another one of Jois’ students, and she claims she has returned to Mysore ten times in the 10 years since beginning her Ashtanga practise (Kino, *The Spiritual Dimension of Yoga with Kino MacGregor*, electronic resources). Mysore, she says, “is the home and heart of the Ashtanga yoga lineage [...] there is no other place on earth that carries the seed of Guruji’s life [...] it’s the journey home for the Ashtanga yoga practitioner” (Kino, *Ashtanga Yoga with Kino Macgregor in Mysore, India*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diPJ0r-QTGU>). She clarifies that this journey to Mysore, far from being a vacation, is an experience unlike any other, where faith in the practise is at its most intense. She claims that being in the studio, the very space Jois occupied with his students has the effect of allowing her mind to be much more concentrated, clear and calm. There is a true inner fire being cultivated, she says, which is “really turned on” by the

sheer fact of practising in an environment and at a time of the day when one would normally not practise. The energy of the *shala*, the practitioners who arrive “with a concentrated intention of going deeper into their practise” coupled with the knowledge that Guruji has sacralized the space makes it possible for one to be carried by this wave of energy ever deeper into one’s practise and oneself. “Obstacles are removed just by the virtue of joining the chain; it’s like a miracle! It’s a wonderful flow” (*Ibid*).

Kino McGregor on her website dedicated to her practise of Ashtanga, concedes that although practising under one of the many accredited teachers in the West can be valuable, it “does not give you the experience of travelling to India, immersing yourself in the culture, the environment and the practise in the same way. Not only does the city of Mysore itself have a certain magic to it but there is also a deep connection to the lineage that happens when you practise in the home of Ashtanga Yoga at its source, at the K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute” (<http://www.kinoyoga.com/why-go-to-mysore-india-and-study-at-the-k-pattabhi-jois-ashtanga-yoga-institute/>). Many who are serious about their practise will refer to Jois as their teacher, their guru (bringer of light), and as one of the original fathers of the Ashtanga practise. While there are other schools around the world now run by those Jois has either certified or accredited, the Mysore K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute considers itself to be only authentic board of certification and the heart of the practise. Students say it is the elite school, the source and the magic. Kino tells us that this journey was pivotal: “the decision to travel to Mysore to study Ashtanga Yoga with R. Sharath Jois at the K. Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute is something that marks a crucial turning point in an Ashtanga Yoga student’s journey into the heart of the method”.

### *The lineage*

With his death, his grandson Sharath Jois has taken over the role of director of the *shala* and for many the death of Pattabhi Jois puts into question the value of the journey to Mysore. The issue of lineage becomes a salient concern; some who say it should not be an inheritance and challenge the notion that the pilgrimage remains a worthwhile one with the passing of he who represents the source of the practise. The website devoted to yoga (Yoga.info) on the other hand, states: “we love being taught by Pattabhi Jois' own daughter and grandson and meeting other Ashtangis from all over the world”. “For an Ashtangi, saying you have studied at the Shri K. Pattabhi Jois

Ashtanga Yoga Institute is a little like a pianist saying they have studied at Juilliard. Exacting, punishing, infinitely rewarding” (<http://www.yoga.info/en/yoga-place/india/mysore/shri-k-pattabhi-jois-ashtanga-yoga-institute>).

### *The heritage*

Mysore was a pilgrimage centre in its own right long before Krishnamacharya came up with his series of *asanas*, but what has changed since the 1970’s is the influx of Mysore pilgrims from the West, whose destination is Jois’ Institute and the Mysore palace where Krishnamacharya’s mandate to “promote the physical well-being of Ursu boys” (as cited in Singleton, 2010, p. 181) led to “a conceptual melding of *asana* and exercise”. “And year-in, year-out, students return to learn more and to live for a while under the guidance of the recognised master, turning their yogic practise into a ritual of self-transformation” (Burger, 2006, p.89). Indeed Burger suggests the pilgrimage is a highly effective hermeneutical tool in the study of modern yoga, and she goes so far as to say that, in the case of Ashtanga yoga “it has the advantage of including the many layers of the phenomenon”.

### *Breaking with the mundane*

Burger (2006) quotes Alan Morinis’ definition of the pilgrimage “as a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal” (as cited in Burger, 2006) and suggests this to be the case for the thousands of Ashtangis who flood into the burgeoning birthplace of their yoga practise. The vast majority of Ashtangis being Western means the journey is costly, time consuming, and possibly arduous. From the closest international airport in the neighbouring city of Bangalore 140 km from Mysore, travellers can opt for just about any means of transportation to their ultimate destination: by foot or elephant, motorbike, car, bus, train, taxi or domestic flight. But this being India much of that seemingly familiar method of travel may prove surprisingly novel to the novitiate pilgrim. The communal metal cup on a chain in lieu of a drinking fountain for those thirsty upon landing at the airport, the blue tarps which line the streets and even the edge of the runway itself providing shelter to homeless Indians, and the dozens of ambitious drivers and guides hungry for the travellers business. Cows roaming the highways, women nursing babies extended alongside the kerbs, children defecating in the streets and bathing in rainwater puddles, the honking, the air pollution, the poverty, the beggars and the garbage on

almost every street corner in Indian cities make this a potentially disturbing and confronting experience for most Westerners travelling to India for the first time.

*Authenticity and the (salvation?) market*

While, for the more dedicated Ashtangis, Jois and his Ashtanga Institute may be the original seat of Ashtanga and the sacred centre of their practise, yoga studios nevertheless abound in the city. There are myriad different venues (*shalas*, studios, institutes and otherwise) and travel agents catering to those who both practise Ashtanga as well as those less practised individuals who are striving to be able to do so. A simple online search reveals a seemingly infinite number of different yoga studios and advice as to when to make the journey, where to stay, what to expect, where and what to eat and how to get around. So while some make this outward journey to Mysore as self-conceived pilgrims in search of an “authentic” experience, journeying motivated by a desire to bring themselves closer to the source of their practise, others are more curious travellers, some religious some not, in search nonetheless of something transformative.

*Journey as initiation*

The journey to the Mysore is initiatory, says Burger (2006), yet potentially instrumental and devotional as well. That is to say Ashtangis are initiated into a transformative state, they are perhaps healed or improved, and they are blessed through their devotion to their teacher/guru and rewarded by being within his field of energy, but there is no question in Burger’s mind that what we are witnessing is without question a process of self-transformation. “As the students in Mysore unfold their practise, knowledge is created and their realities are altered. Change can, for some students, be gradual and partial, while for others it can be abrupt and total. In both cases, transformation is a major trait that comes about through yogic practise” (p.2).

## 2.2.2 Exploring the inward pilgrimage experience in practise

*“The yoga of pilgrimage calls for actions that purify body, speech and mind”.*

(Parker, 2004, p. 110)

### *The elusive, exclusive destination*

Canadian accredited Ashtanga teacher, David Robson, who runs an Ashtanga shala in downtown Toronto, claims it took him five journeys to Mysore to understand the Ashtanga system. The learning is continuous, he says, and the destination is one which is never truly attained: “I’m still doing it, I’m still on the path; I’m not there yet!” (*Toronto Body Mind with David Robson*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D9PLP\\_BTCw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7D9PLP_BTCw)). He clarifies that the depth of the practise, although beginning with physical postures cannot be seen in *asana* – “there’s not just exercises going on!”

### *Initiatory agency*

Evidence of postural yoga *asana* as an initiatory agency for inner transformation in firsthand accounts of Mysore Ashtanga pilgrims is often richly detailed and eloquently expressed: Kino McGregor speaks precisely of her practise of Ashtanga as having effected, over years of consistent *asana*, a power inside her body, mind and life. Her experience of the postures in the physical practise is that they are of the tools that allow her to gaze within and then transform herself through that “vehicle”. The physical postures she sees as a mirror to look within, and she says she places her mind within her body and realises in so doing that no matter how difficult it is to maintain a posture, there is “ease and grace” on the other side. This placing of her mind inside her body lets her get in touch with that which she refers to as an evolution of the human spirit that she witnesses in herself.

### *Testing physical limits*

The postures present challenges to one’s comfort zone, pushing at one’s limits physically. The confrontation to one’s perceived limits, she says, stresses one’s nervous system. When the nervous system is stressed and the mind can remain calm and focused, one is able to tap into a power in oneself one might never have known existed. The false stress of yoga *asana* to the nervous system requires an individual to breathe, to gaze and to stay focused and in doing so one realises one’s

inner strength: McGregor claims her physical practise awakened her to the power within, the power she felt in her physical body and subsequently in her mind to overcome the physical and mental obstacles and limitations which prevented her from being at peace.

“Yoga has been portrayed quite brilliantly actually as sort of somehow a luxury- but it isn't a luxury, or artificial, or superficial- it's absolutely integral and most if anything more real than any of us”, says Russell Brand, actor and comedian and student of Ashtanga yoga in an interview with Eddie Stern (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfB6cVdzq5c>).

### *Transcending physical limits*

Eddie Stern suggests similarly, that the physical practise acts as a mirror to help us see what's wrong with us. Musician and yoga practitioner (*Moby's story: music, health and yoga*, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXvnlt5JbII>) who began with an Ashtanga practise introduced to him through Stern, demonstrates how this was indeed the case in his own practise, exploring how his approach in life generally was “tight and defensive”, and this was mirrored in his practise in the beginning. In fact, one specific posture engendered in him severe panic attacks as he tried to hold them, yet he remained focused and over time was not only able to relax into the posture but to find it restorative. And although he initially turned to yoga as a convenient means of staying physically fit while on the road performing, he now does recognise a spiritual element to his practise.

Yoko is another of Stern's students who has been practising with him as her teacher for over 16 years, speaks of the power of the physical practise on her psyche: when diagnosed with cancer and in hospital connected to machines to the extent that she felt trapped within her body, she tells how she mentally envisioned herself performing the asana and going through her physical practise completely in her head alone, and “it worked! Hey this is great I don't even need a body!” (*Yoko's story*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6V5oR21YhU>). She completely transcended the body while still using the imagery of her physical practise to do so, imagining and envisioning herself performing her *asana*, and through that mental journey found she was capable of eliciting the same response. This so much resembles the inner yogic pilgrimage where the inner-outer distinction becomes harder to make, enmeshed as they become, unified and dependant upon each other in that experience of embodiment. Her physical practise gives her inner mental strength, and she

attempts to verbalise this: “I can't explain it intellectually but it was like a light coming through and entering my third eye, my heart and my root *chakra* and feeling cleansed and purified”. She credits her Ashtanga yoga practise for her being alive today, her cancer in remission.

Stern, who teaches Ashtanga yoga in his Manhattan studio full time, points out that even though he can physically see the expressions of his students change during their practise, most of the change that takes place is actually internal. His student Michael Halsband, photographer and filmmaker, who photographed popular contemporary musicians for the bulk of his career, began to practise Ashtanga when he reached a turning point in his career. His work “seemed less important and he was getting worse not better” at his craft; he was feeling sluggish and unfulfilled. Of his physical practise he says there is not only an effect in the moment and day to day, but also a cumulative effect that he describes as “really powerful”; “you don't see it in the moment, but then you look back and great things are happening!” (*Michael's story*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gx3eb6Lp4R0>). He became, he says, more honest with himself through his practise, and was able to “get in touch with what resonated within him most deeply”. As a result he made significant changes in his career, his new work he claims is much more aligned with his yoga practise.

Jois himself taught that first one must practise *asana* and only after what might possibly even amount to years of a dedicated practise might one experience something spiritual. *Asana* is the foundation, it is the root of the practise, and one that McGregor insists cannot be forced. Moby (*Moby's story*) relates to this need to go at one's individual pace and explore the *asana* as a personal relationship which must develop unique to every practitioner; he tells how when he first began his practise he became preoccupied with trying to keep up with other practitioners and his competitive nature manifested itself as a forcing and pushing that set him back in his practise.

In *Ashtanga yoga: practise and philosophy*, author and practitioner Maehle advises “posture cannot be achieved unless we reach into these opposing directions...these directions are firmness, which is inner strength, and the direction of ease, which brings relaxedness” (2007, p.225). Contraction of the muscles must be married with ease so as to keep the practise soft; according to Patanjali, the ideal yogi will balance *sthira* (firmness) and *sukham* (softness) to make “all of his movements true posture” (p.226). This is a progression from physical and emotional weaknesses



to gradual strength- the postures are a tool for creating strength from weaknesses. Maehle acknowledges a tendency in students of modern yoga to push themselves, much as Moby relates, so aggressively into postures as to elicit pain. This also makes one preoccupied with the body filling one's field of perception with pain and distracting the mind. Postures, he contends, become *asana* only when they are held comfortably.

The places that frighten us in our postures, that feel the most tenuous, McGregor says, are those very places that need opening up, pushing through and beyond. In an interview with Yoga Conference in Koln in 2013 she tells how her Ashtanga practise is filled with life changing moments, and that at every seeming plateau and level is the invitation to go deeper through the postures, and that her favourite postures are those that challenge her most for this holds the potential for growth through learning: "*asana* helps me grow". But she also stresses the need for softness in the practise as opposed to force. "It was the first experience of connection, belief, peace, healing in the body that I had known", she says of her transformation through Ashtanga in *The Spiritual Dimension of Yoga* ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BxgyV49\\_ag](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BxgyV49_ag)). But for each and every individual that begins a practise, the relationship to the postures and the impediments experienced in the practise are unique to him. She suggests that yoga is a journey to which one must commit, finding a teacher and devoting oneself to him then going deeply into the practise and submitting. At the heart of yoga is devotion and surrendering of ego. Initially, she says, the physical practise is a gross relationship to the body, and over the course of time and practise there is this refinement; "there is a presence: a subtle energy flow". This is the subtle body that one comes into contact with as one continues a dedicated practise in *asana*, and she describes this subtle body as the "God within".

Russell Brand, Ashtanga student of Stern's, describes his physical practise as devotional: "I think I am instinctually a very devotional person but I recognise an authenticity through (Ashtanga) yogic practise: moment to moment union with God. I feel an authenticity I don't feel anywhere else in my life" (*Transformation through yoga*). He tells how he grew up outside of London with his mother as a confused child "not understanding anything, yearning, longing sense of emptiness" and when he took acid he had a "sudden flash of objectivity towards something as centrifugal as sense of Self". In a similar way, his discovery of yoga made a new realm accessible to him: "I feel like we live on the tip of the iceberg, if we had different senses we'd be aware of whizzing sprites

and forces, and energies and lightning! Worrying about some punnet of material existence don't seem that important anymore.” Brand describes how he doesn't take life as seriously since he began becoming serious about his Ashtanga practise: Ashtanga has given way to a newfound sense of genuine communion, a different relationship with time and a discovery of living “in the moment”. One’s reality, he says, is a result of one’s intention and attention, and Brand says he makes an effort, since coming to Ashtanga, to live spiritually in every aspect of his life, moment to moment.

Brand’s physical Ashtanga practise has been a journey within, an inner quest in which this new realm he describes having entered has revealed to him a different perspective, one in which he is able to sense a god within, a god accessible to all: “I think if people have some sort of yearning or dissatisfaction or some itchy irritability then it might be because they are not looking in the right direction for a solution and that they should look within: within them there’s a limitless, infinite capacity for bliss through connection to other things”. McGregor describes the power of the physical practise as a means of altering one’s perception, and in a very concrete way it is specifically the gaze or *drishti* which aids in training the mind to be objective: when following one’s practise the gaze reverts to the external world and “the paradigm through which the world is viewed is shifted, allowing one to more closely see the world as it truly is” (*The Spiritual Dimension of Yoga*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BxgyV49\\_ag](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BxgyV49_ag)). “As your mind is able to move into more rarefied states of consciousness [...] there are whole other worlds that begin to be revealed to you [...] new depths inside of the body and new depths inside the world around you; this true state of union is only possible when you commit to the practise”. It is through commitment and regular practise that the potential for communion with the sacred becomes possible.

### *Communitas*

If one’s practise is an internal and individualistic journey, McGregor refers nevertheless to a sense of community she feels with the other practitioners in the *shala*. She talks of the incredible energy of everyone practising together in the presence of her teacher Jois, as being unlike anything she might feel practising alone. She is challenged to become open to her constraints in her practise of *asana* and then, once she has, she says she is also more able to be open with those around her,

more willing to share herself with others. This sense of communion is echoed by Willem Dafoe who claims that in his Ashtanga practise, even though he doesn't know the other practitioners in the room personally he nevertheless feels an intimacy with them through their shared practise. (*Willem Dafoe about Ashtanga yoga*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKCUkBIHfQ>). This shared experience among those who practise Ashtanga in the same space can be a bonding experience for some. Dafoe talks of this “amazing connection” he has had with other students in the class, in a real experience of *communitas*: “You go into class and you see people every day...and by sheer habit they insinuate themselves into your consciousness, and you feel such incredible intimacy with them- but you don't know their name, you don't know what they do, you have never even heard their voice! It's pretty wild!”

## **2.3 Transcendent embodiment**

### **2.3.1 Interpreting academic perspectives**

#### *The body as sacred*

“The beauty of the men and women practising at the *shala* is striking. They stroll leisurely around [...] Harmonious. Upright postures. Not an ounce of excessive fat. They lounge on the floor at *Santosh*, sitting cross-legged, straight backed. Effortless, scantily clad, tanned fit bodies line the pool”, fellow Ashtangi and researcher remarks of the community of Ashtangis upon his arrival at Mysore: “they are a family, he says, a collective of practitioners who share this fascination and respect for the body” (Langøien, 2013, p.1), and the relationship they have with it can be seen as an interesting manifestation of contemporary body worship and worship through the body both.

#### *Recreating identity: the body as vehicle*

The activities which Ashtangis pursue can be seen to be tailored perfectly to what Heelas, scholar of New Age Movements, refers to as the affinity based groups whose interest in the use of the body as a vehicle for the spiritual experience creates cohesive bonds. Affirmation is found amongst members of the community of one's embodiment and existence (Dziuban, 2007, p.486). “It is clear that many Western practitioners have developed a self-identity through their involvement with yoga as a social assemblage of practise, community, media and consumption that produces Ashtangis as subjects” (p.11) concludes Benjamin Richard Smith (2007) who explores the

everyday practise of Ashtanga yoga in both Australia and in Mysore. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that “yoga practise seems to produce changes in embodiment deeply at odds with these aspects of cosmopolitan subjectivity, a stilling or detachment from the aspirational drive, and an attention to embodiment which seems to prove itself as a profound corrective to the late modern quotidian”.

Dziuban, postgraduate student of sociology and comparative religions from Poland, studies the process through which bodily boundaries are being shaped by the different religious and social formations of late modernity. In her article *Spirituality and the body in late modernity* (2007), she argues that the body can “become the focal point, often of the utmost concern” (p.486) in many contemporary movements, to the point of one’s being preoccupied with one’s relationship to it and with it, both as well as with others. But as much as the body is objectified, what seems paradoxical although nevertheless true for many contemporary movements is that “the body can serve not only as a crucial dimension of one’s spiritual search and development, but as a site for religious expression” as well, she says. Dziuban claims, “during the process of autonomous self-expression and identity transformation, the body as well as the Self is being sacralized, in the sense that it is treated is as the subject, rather than an object, through which an individual undertakes the quest for spiritual development” (p.480).

### *The paradox of embodiment*

The serious Mysore Ashtangi pilgrim, if his practise matures to the point where he begins seeking development or else spontaneously experiences it, is indeed the subject of his experience. Objectification and perfection of the body, however, is ironically what draws most Ashtangis to the practise initially; the superficiality of the novice’s yoga can be seen to deepen over the evolution of his practise into something more subjective where the body is the guide. “A different body is enacted and brought into being as the yoga practise is appropriated” (Langøien, 2013, p.140). At the same time, many more experienced practitioners recognise this state of initially heightened bodily awareness as something to be ultimately overcome through maturity of one’s practise. The ultimate goal of yoga is to become detached from the body, so that while it remains the tool for transformation, it ideally ferries the practitioner from his mundane world to a state of bliss without disturbance. When yoga practitioners talk about ‘pushing through’ it is not about

pushing one's bodies into painful positions but rather about pushing beyond one's attachment to the body, mastering it to the point where it no longer becomes a limitation or impediment to the ultimate place of meditative peace and joy, of *samadhi*.

One might describe this as a progression through stages of embodiment. The initial identification of unity with the body is that awareness of the Self as a "lived body": a subjective body. In *Meaning and movement, sport and physical education* (1979), author Peter J. Arnold explores the person as an embodied consciousness, and suggests that embodiment "redresses the neglect of the body in Western philosophic thought" (p.1). He also claims that the lived body is felt most "poignantly [...] *in, by and through* movement in its various forms" (p.5). This movement in the Ashtanga practise leading to an awareness of the lived body, and progressing toward what is referred to as the yoga body, or subtle body: the spirit residing within.

Geshe Lhundup Sopa in *An excursus on the subtle body in tantric Buddhism* (1983) refers to this as the non-duality of emptiness and bliss, and such a description might assist in elucidating the experience of moving beyond awareness of the lived body, to enter into a blissful state of spiritual transcendence and consciousness. Eckhart Tolle, contemporary spiritualist and author of *A new earth* (2005) describes similarly what happens when one discovers one's inner space: "So your physical body, which is form, reveals itself as essentially formless when you go deeper into it. It becomes a doorway into inner space. Although inner space has no form it is intensely alive [...] it is the unmanifested Source out of which all manifestation flows [...] that Source is God" (p.251). "We have to enter the body to go beyond it and find out that we are not that" (p.252), he concludes.

#### *The body as the site of religious expression: enacting the yoga body*

Helena, a student of Ashtanga who has made the pilgrimage to Mysore to practise yoga with Jois, says that the ultimate goal of her practise is to reunite her soul, which resides in her body, with the Spirit (Langøien, p.141). There is an embodied sense of alterity, and in connecting holistically the mind with the body, one is able to connect with the Self, and seemingly paradoxically, to the Other. "In Ashtanga [...] the body is fundamental. It is perhaps the foremost inroad to and tool for making the journey to *Samadhi* (contemplation) [...] the yoga body is enacted in the physical practise [...] this enactment can be foundational in transforming the practitioners and their life worlds" (p.135, 132).

Last year Dutch anthropologist and Ashtangi Lars Langøien completed his Doctoral thesis entitled *Pay attention! Listen to your heart* (2013); he personally went to Mysore to practise at the KPJAYI. He engulfed himself in the community of Ashtangis and conducted extensive interviews with the other practitioners attending the *shala* alongside him in an attempt to explore the *unfolding practise, changing realities and awareness of the embodied Self in Ashtanga yoga*. The body is the tool of transformation in the Ashtanga practise, he claims. The body is the point of entry into the spirit and it is also the product of transformation. As the practise unfolds, the relationship with the body and with one's reality is altered.

### *The subjective experience of journeying*

Attempting to qualify this relationship of the Ashtangi to his body as his practise matures can prove a difficult task, and as Bea Hauser explores in *Yoga Travelling* (2013), “The corporeal encounter of yoga is thus shaped by the living conditions, values and structures in the community of practise [...] bodily practise- and it's twin: embodied knowledge- constitute an epistemic entity that differs in its capacity to be translated across distant social environments from the global circulation of cognitive knowledge. What yoga is and does depends on the expectations of practitioners” (p.132). This notwithstanding, if one chooses to use an academic model such as that proposed by Merleau-Ponty, who emphasises the body as the most fundamental tool in the search for understanding of his world: it is through our bodily experience that we are transformed universally. The body is our general medium for having a world, he claims in *The phenomenology of perception* (1996), and through this body we are in a continual process of becoming through subjective experience. The body is thus the subject of experience, but as Langøien explores, the boundaries demarcating the objective from the subjective experience in Ashtangis do seem to overlap, and these effects are far from linear. The body is often objectified through the physical practise but is also the source of the subjective experience. Some practitioners recognise that to go even more deeply into the Self the body must ultimately be transcended, but in such a way that the postures become natural and effortless and the impediments to full concentration have been themselves transcended, so that the practitioner's awareness of his body is replaced by a deep state of uninterrupted peace and contemplation. The body is not denied but rather mastered: “Ashtanga advocates mastering the body and building it in order to be able to not be bothered by it in later stages of the spiritual journey” (Langøien, 2013, p.141). The process of holistic merging of body

and mind, or beyond that mastering the body to be able to move beyond it, resembles what Connolly (2007) describes when he gives some background to yoga philosophy in his text *A student's guide to the history and philosophy of yoga*. What all schools of Eastern (ancient) yoga share is that “there has to be a radical reorientation on the part of an individual: from identification with the body-mind to either identification with a Self, in the case of Hindus and Jains, or just seeing the Self for the illusion that it is, in the case of the Buddhists” (p.18).

### *The body as guide*

*Asana*, alongside *pranayama*, *bandhas* and *drishti*, is thought to cleanse the physical body and in turn the mind. When the mind is cleansed concentration is improved and through a process of growth and change one is ultimately able to experience that “all is coming” (Jois, 2010): revelation, transformation and peace. The lived body is the subject and is a guide map of the soul: when the practitioner manipulates his body into a posture and the body resists it may cause fear or anxiety, and for many these spontaneous biological reactions serve as symbolic markers of emotional, psychological or spiritual impediments to growth. Backbends very commonly elicit strong emotional outbursts in practitioners, sometimes bringing about uncontrollable responses: tears and sobbing, or laughter, or states in between. And for many Ashtangis the body is tangible evidence of both progress and impediment to progress. The practise becomes a measuring stick of one's spiritual growth. In one's body one may evidence what the mind might only suspect: that balance, strength and flexibility is improved, that one is healthier, stronger, more focused. “The body, in being experienced as more tangible and clearly visible, becomes the handle that can steer change in the other, and in some ways more fundamental, parts of the being” (Langøien, 2013, p.135).

### *Heightened sensitivity*

Heelas, scholar of New Age Movements, explores the importance of the Self as spiritual guide and source of meaning. The individual is responsible for his own growth and development; “considerable importance is attached to the voice of experience; experience which emanates from the heart of one's subjective life [...] with time devoted to activities which enable one to ‘make contact’ with the spiritual dimension” (Heelas, 2009, p.224). As the practise evolves, one's sensitivity is heightened, not only to one's physical state but to one's mental state as well. “Everything is more sensitive [...] [my body] is more finely calibrated. I have to keep up the

exercise so it becomes a kind of Self, and at times I can get very disturbed by that. What the fuck is this all about? Let me be!” (as cited in Langøien, 2013, p.138).

### *The mechanical motion of the soul*

“Aristotle thought that finding out anything about the soul was extremely difficult [...] but, at any rate, the soul has a motion within space of its own, which is imparted kinesthetically, or mechanically, to the body. Possessing and generating motion, the soul is composed of ‘soulish’ material” (Van Deusen in *Ensouled bodies, the continuity of the theme of the body as instrument*, 2007, p.281).

If the transcendent is to be perceived through the body, it begins, in the physical practise of Ashtanga, with kinetic ritualistic movement. The body is the instrument that facilitates the spiritual experience, and through vigorous movement, heat, sweat and repetitive sequences of postures one’s likelihood of going deeper into the Self is improved. It is interesting to note that, in the tradition of gymnastics that were to have influenced Mysore style *hatha* yoga, the concept of the body as being instrumental in the perception of the divine was also seen as foundational.

### *Achieving harmony*

Mark Singleton, who has written extensively on the history and development of Ashtanga yoga, adds further insight to our understanding of the relationship this physical practise has with the spiritual: he claims that one of the most significant strands in the development of transnational yoga is the tradition of women’s gymnastics which became popular in Europe and America during the nineteenth century, and which he refers to as “harmonial gymnastics” (Hauser, p. 49). These systems, he says, which in many cases predate contemporary transnational *hatha* yoga (Ashtanga), prescribe “stretching and rhythmic breathing”; the modern Ashtanga yoga class “arguably owes more to these traditions of women’s gymnastics than it does to the *hatha* yoga systems handed down in the history of yoga” (p.50). If this is indeed the case, then it is interesting to note that some of the more influential harmonial systems synthesising yoga and gymnastics strongly emphasised embodiment. American Genevieve Stebbins popularised the notion, in her 1893 book *Dynamic breathing and harmonic gymnastics: a complete system of psychical, aesthetic and physical culture*, that deep breathing coupled with gymnastics was a system for “body, brain and



soul: a system of training which shall bring this grand trinity of the human microcosm into one continuous, interacting unison”. In the influential text *Divine posture influence upon the endocrine glands*, American author Ali (1928) insists the key to spiritual truth lies in the individual body, and the “divine” postures permit one to “bring one into harmony with the God who is ‘individualised within’ ”. *Hatha Yoga* classes today, Singleton claims, “stem in large part from the modern traditions of quasi-mystic body conditioning” (Singleton, p.51).

#### *An inside perspective*

Suzanne Newcombe (2005), anthropologist, surveyed a number of British students she qualified as serious in their practise of postural yoga. What she ultimately concluded was that their quality of life was felt, subjectively, to be improved and enriched through their practise, and she likened their experience, when it might be qualified as spiritual, to resemble the kind of mystical experience as described by Troeltsch: experiential, subjective, internal and individual. Sociologist Verena Schnabele, in exploring postural yoga in contemporary German society, maintains as her thesis that contemporary postural yoga is a pursuit which answers to individual’s needs: it “creates an ‘inside’ perspective of a productive useful body that stands in contrast to the ‘outside’ perspective that consumer society has of the physical body” (Hauser, 2013, p.135).

#### *Binary duality*

Philosopher Sundar Sarrukai, at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, India, has attempted to make sense of this binary duality of inside/outside and inner/outer that Merleau-Ponty proposes distinguishes human embodied experience, and he explores the inherent ambiguity of these terms in his thesis *Inside-outside: Merleau-Ponty yoga* (2002). “Yoga, in its emphasis on techniques of body control and breathing, allows for a rich phenomenological interpretation of the inner body” (p.459). Sarrukai proposes that the yogi perceives the inner body through the methods he employs of *asana*, coupled with *pranayama*, *bandhas* and *drishti*, but he does so without the duality that Merleau-Ponty seems himself to struggle with. There is a dichotomy which even the author himself seems challenged to overcome in analysing the individual subjective experience: “I believe the most important reason for this continued ambiguity regarding the notion of *inner* with respect to the body (in Merleau-Ponty’s academic work) is to be found in the absence of a tradition of lived experience of the *inner* body in the West [...]. In contrast, the phenomenological experiences

of yoga strongly suggest the possibility of a lived experience of the *inner body*” (p.462).

Perhaps the most interesting possibility for the astounding popularity of Ashtanga yoga amongst Westerners is the idea of a more profound correspondence between "God" and movement into the inner body, the kind of movement that is visualized in the internal pilgrimage of some *tantric* and *hatha* traditions. Perhaps it is the pilgrimage, which Westerners have been challenging themselves to undertake, in ever increasing numbers to sacred sites the world over, which we are also driven toward unwittingly, unconsciously, in the yoga studio: in so many ways the journey during one's Ashtanga practise mirrors the pilgrim's experience.

#### *Ritual as agent for the experience*

Ritual defines the practise of Ashtanga, and may indeed be considered an agent in experience of unity of body and mind, and catalyst for the embodied experience. The student and/or teacher will often attempt to cultivate a calm and serene environment in which to practise yoga, thereby creating a marked transition from one space to another; many students find even crossing the threshold into the studio creates a shift in them. The opening *mantra* (prayer) makes a clear start to one's practise, the chanting marking the transition from one's everyday mundane existence and encouraging the Ashtangi to redirect his energy and focus. The sacred syllable *Om* is repeated at the beginning and end of the mantra; this is said to be the sound of the universe, which will resonate in the heart. The series of sun salutations are repeated at the outset of the practise and mark the beginning of the series of postures, and it has been posited that these salutations *dands*, may be based on the ancient Indian practise of prostrations during pilgrimage (deMaitre as cited in Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 2010).

#### *One single reality*

In this light, the practise can be conceived of as a ritualised outward journey in which one strives to reach an ideal, as well as one internal: a metaphor for an actual pilgrimage. Yet the practise, historically, of yoga as an internal pilgrimage was not simply a metaphor but also very literally a spiritual journeying within. This can only make sense when the binary of inner and outer, inside and outside, Self and alterity as separate entities makes way for the “distinctive characteristic of the monistic schemata (of ancient yoga) [...] that God(s), Self, and world are all embodiments or

expressions of a single reality” (Taylor, 2008, p.136).

### 2.3.2 Interpreting the symbolic perspectives

#### *A monistic ontology*

Ernest Wood was the English author of *Yoga*, first published in 1959, and translator of Sanskrit passages on ancient yoga. He had a hand in helping Westerners make sense of the monistic principles of ancient yoga, which stand in contrast to the Western dualism, which assumes a very different conception of the universe and man’s relationship with it. This single reality, which forms the basis of the monistic schemata, earlier referred to as the subtle body, he refers to as one’s “latent body-power”. Wood describes this internal and latent power as a force called *Kundalini*, which means coiled up, and is centred at the base of one’s spine. In yoga literature this *Kundalini* is spoken of as a *devi*, a female Hindu deity, and is conceived of as a spiritual element in the material, akin to the Holy Ghost in Christian faiths thought to reside in us always to some degree (p.140). There are two classes of yoga literature, says he: *hatha* yoga and *tantric* yoga (*tantra* meaning guiding lines or instructions), which describe the process of awakening this latent energy in the body and guiding it in its ascent from the base of the spine upward, the ultimate goal the experience of union with the divine.

#### *Tantric homologies*

“*Tantric* conceptions of the body consistently place the human organism into a relation of structural homology to the macrocosm”, writes scholar of Sufism and the internal pilgrimage in *Mapping the esoteric body in the Islamic yoga of Bengal* (Hatley, 2007, p.353). “The yogic pilgrimage falls outside of the dualistic inward/ outward journey Westerners tend to differentiate as either literal or metaphorical pilgrimages, where the sacred centre lies somewhere out beyond, but rather an inward and internal both physical and spiritual journey of transcendence. Nowhere is this more palpably evident than in the “higher *tantras*” (Samuel, 2008, p.255) in which we are provided an “introduction of a system of internal yogic practises based on a subtle anatomy of internal channels (*nadi*) and meeting places (*chakra*)”. Hatley explores the widespread prevalence of *tantric* yoga practises in Asia, and offers a synopsis of the homologies which render this mysterious relationship sublimely visual: “This mapping of bio cosmological equivalence extends

from celestial realms and hell worlds –and the rivers, mountains, and pilgrimage centres of sacred geography– to the social world, rendering mastery of the external universe possible through yogic technique alone” (Hatley, 2007, p.353).

### *The inner landscape*

“All mountains, all rivers, holy lakes, *tirthas*, the abodes of seers, cow pens, and temples of Gods are sin destroying localities” (Gautama (*circa* 200 BC) as cited in Bharati, 1985, p.137), and in the practise of *laya-yoga* in particular, each of these sin destroying localities can be reached by turning one’s eyes inward and visualizing the cosmos internalised, each human being containing the essence of the universe within. It is the subtle body one makes the journey toward, the spirit which is believed to make its home in each of us which becomes the destination of the pilgrimage. This yoga uses the internal pilgrimage as a means of awakening the goddess within and reaching the transcendental state of union with the divine.

### *Body in service to the divine*

Wood (1961) attempts to clarify the divine in the monistic schemata: it is present in the body, in the mind, and above both body and mind. The *laya-yoga* practises are a means of knowing the divine by employing external and mental means to awaken the *Kundalini* “so that she starts up hissing like a sleeping snake which has been disturbed by a poking stick” (p.146) and travels up the spine on a journey to the brain. It is here in the brain that that the *Kundalini* culminates, ideally, in the “thrill of ecstatic intuition” and the latent body-power receives the “spiritual sunshine”: the goddess is united with her spiritual spouse and the body, in literal and physical service to the divine, flowers. “Now the true man is born and every function is sanctified and enhanced by the new service”.

### *The seeds of spiritual union*

In journeying from the base of the spine to the brain, the *Kundalini* works its way through spinal channels, *nadi*, and passes through, perhaps lingering in six stations conceived of as wheels (*chakras*) or lotuses (*padmas*). In *hatha* and *tantric* books, specific directions are given for diverse and different practises with the common theme being ultimate reliance on one’s own body: “The true mode of being of the bodily aspect at the disciple’s basis (prior to embarking on the path) is

the subtle body that consists of channels, energies and the pure elements of the white and red drops”: drops that literally create life, and that metaphorically give life to the “spiritual birth of the mind of enlightenment” (Bentor as cited in White, 2001, p.332). Wood translates from Sanskrit a description of *laya-yoga* devotional meditation he claims is considered one of the most beautiful:

Let him find in his heart a broad ocean of nectar,  
 Within it a beautiful island of gems,  
 Where the sands are bright golden and sprinkled with jewels.  
 Fair trees line its shores with a myriad of blooms,  
 And within it rare bushes, trees, creepers and rushes,  
 On all sides shed fragrance most sweet to the senses.

Who would taste of the sweetness of divine completeness  
 Should picture therein a most wonderful tree,  
 On whose far spreading branches grow fruit of all fancies-  
 The four mighty teachings that hold up the world.  
 There the fruit and the flowers know no death and no sorrows,  
 While to them the bees hum and soft cuckoos sing.

Now, under the shadow of that peaceful harbour  
 A temple of rubies most radiant is seen.  
 And he who shall seek there will find on a seat rare,  
 His dearly Beloved enshrined therein.  
 Let him dwell with his mind, as his teacher defines,  
 On that divine Form, with its modes and its signs.

### *Internalizing the symbols and the signifiers*

The path for the disciple is the function of one’s devotion and worship, and along the journey one visualizes heaven-like manifestations of the divine. To a Westerner, the vivid imagery invoked in the internal pilgrimage may seem magical, enchanting and otherworldly: how does a disenchanted Westerner relate to seeming fantasy as a means for experiencing the sacred? Yet to a yogi who meditates upon the sounds and images, symbols and colours that he internalises from his outer world and imagination both, he has used his body as a host for the sacred and evoked the sacred within it. He might invite gods and goddesses with varying configurations of heads and arms and both human and animal parts as well into himself and worship them, and to a Westerner this carnival of deities bears no resemblance to our own imagery; Wood suggests that in attempting to understand the conception of multiple deities as manifestations of a single Divine source that one consider these gods as Western religions consider angels: being the word of God while also the

spirit of God. This parallel might assist us in understanding how this ancient yoga claims a single monistic reality as the foundation of its tenets. Our Western understanding is that this belief system of theirs is polytheistic, yet Wood points out that their multiple gods are avatars for a singular supreme divinity: that is the monistic schemata.

Of the great three Hindu Gods most likely encountered in one's *laya-yoga* pilgrimage, "Shiva is only God's will or purpose, Vishnu God's love or kindness, and Brahma God's materially creative presence. And even this will, love and thought are only regarded as expressions of the one divine Reality (*sat*), Consciousness (*chit*) and Joy (*ananda*) which are beyond mind" (Wood, 1959, p. 148). One makes a connection with the divine in the body, in the mind and ultimately beyond both. The representations and methodology may seem foreign to a Westerner, but the gifts inherent in the encounter with the internalised realm of the sacred nevertheless show correspondences with Western pilgrimages. Given the vast majority of Westerners practising Ashtanga make little association between these images and the sacred, it is perhaps an obvious conclusion that it boils down to the body, so long ignored and denied in most traditional Western worship, except when on that outward pilgrimage, which allows for this communion with the sacred while travelling within the physical confines of one's yoga mat.

### *Spiritual living rooted in the physical*

Gotz, in exploring the potential for embodiment to bring about spiritual experiences in his treatise *Spirituality and the body* (2001), says "the primitive mind is animistic; it knows nothing of lifeless matter, whether in places, trees, animals or clouds. We moderns have construed progress as growth beyond this panpsychic monism" (p.5). Ultimately, he argues, traditional dualism must make way for "material dimensions of existence" (p.2), and he argues that through movement, unity of body and mind and with dedication and focus, physical activity can become the basis for a spiritual life.

### *The yogic "place"*

Simon Coleman, pilgrimage scholar, in his contribution entitled *Pilgrimage*, in *The Blackwell companion to the study of religion* (2009), isolates three elements, which he believes summarise pilgrimage: "place, movement and motivation". This "place" is the sacred centre; in its physical field of space lies the sacred, and in journeying toward or within it, the spiritual is made manifest.

The pilgrim can come closer to the sacred, the divine, through the inhabitation of this physical field where he can, in essence, commune with it. In the practise of the Yogic inner pilgrimage, this is precisely the aim.

Coleman explores the Hindu Sanskrit derived word *tirtha*. This word encapsulates the concept of "place" linked to "movement" insofar as it unites multiple definitions given it through the notion of motion, or passage between the mundane world and the realm of the gods. Movement is synonymous with transformation in the context of *tirtha*, it is a necessary aspect of spiritual growth. Movement is also not just a means to an end, it is not simply just about making it to the site itself but is a necessary component of any pilgrimage. In the practise of tantric yoga, bodily movement accompanies visualization, and *asana* is one of the many tools employed in the internal journey. Movement even when the pilgrimage is internal remains nevertheless often a critical component in reaching the sacred place within. Movement assists one in crossing over into the realm of the sacred.

Diana Eck explores the concept and significance of the Indian *tirtha* in *India's "tirthas": "crossings" in sacred geography* (1981), which she suggests might best be seen as fords, or crossing points. Historically, she says, a *tirtha* is seen as a place of "powerful and direct communication between this world and the other" (p.337) which because of the place and journey transform otherwise ordinary rites into extraordinary acts. Imagine the human body as a microcosm of the universe, containing within it sacred *tirthas* in the form of embodied mountains, rivers and lakes. "The journey to the *tirtha* is both an interior and a geographical journey and the crossing is, in part, within", says Eck. The "Indian tradition balances the pilgrim's faith in the sheer transforming power of the place itself with a persistent reminder that the *tirtha* is an internal as well as an external crossing and that the *tirtha* to which one journeys is also close within" (p.340).

*Correspondences: chanting and gazing*

In his book *After god* (2008), Mark C. Taylor explores religion and postmodernity, and explains that the monistic theology at the heart of yoga philosophy is one in which "the real is imminent, that it is in some way present here and now" versus the dualism of monotheistic theology in which "the real is transcendent, that is, absent or, more precisely, present elsewhere" (p.297). Western

dualism is in profound contrast with the ancient practise of yoga, says Connolly (2007), wherein the "individual level is a microcosm of the macrocosm" (p.18). The divine, in the practise of yoga, is within: the *adhyatmika* (Self) is the reflection of the *adhidaivika* (the cosmos or the divinities) in much the same way that the *atman* (Self/ soul) is presented in the *Upanisads* as a biological principle while also embodying a cosmological principle (Kulkarni, 1972, p.24).

There are other correspondences also which are prevalent in the practise of yoga, which are much less so in the West outside of the pilgrimage. Connolly (2007) explores these "parallelisms bordering on identity between different realms of the universe and between words and things" (p.18) and makes reference to what Mircea Eliade, in his treatise *The sacred and the profane* (1967) coined "homologies" between words and things with levels of the cosmos and mental states. He uses the wind as an example, which in ancient yoga literature is a cosmic phenomenon, a deity, the air, and at the human level, one's very breath. Things have material form and all form in turn has a corresponding sound just as all sounds have a corresponding form. This idea of *nama-rupa* (name-form) is the reason for which in yoga practise *mantras*, chants are used to elicit specific effects through particular sounds. There are sacred words that can bring about mental and physical states through their associations.

Gazing in the Hindu tradition, explain Eck and Daraan in *Seeing the sacred* (1998), is another aspect of yoga which can impart spiritual blessings. This seeing of the sacred, *darsan*, is quite literally a visual perception in which the object being viewed endows the one gazing with divine energy. The divine can also return the gaze and in doing so confer spiritual blessings. The image being visualised can be seen as the manifestation of macrocosm/microcosm where the object itself contains within in its material form the very presence of the divine. "Beholding the image is an act of worship, and through the eyes one gains the blessings of the divine" (p.3). Interestingly, the author draw a parallel to demonstrate that when one goes on (external) pilgrimage in India, it is for the *darsan* of the pilgrimage centre, it is specifically to view the place and the deities residing there. But by contrast with the Christian pilgrimage, "there has never been the confusion of image with idol" (p.4) and the image of the deity can be conceived of as the very deity itself. The place is conceived of as the "epiphany" of the divine and the gods in whom the divine resides, the Himalayan mountains the home of the gods, the river Ganges the *tirtha*, the ladder between heaven and earth. Dyczkowski, in his text exploring *The inner pilgrimage of the tantras* (2001), describes



the internal pilgrimage: “The external sacred geography draws its power from its internal counterpart, while the inner geography derives its form from the outer. Thus the two give life to one another, even when their relationship has been interiorized [...]. It sucks into itself the outer form to place it at the very centre of reality” (p.4).

## **2.4 Partial Conclusion**

Surveying the different angles of the Ashtanga pilgrimage, outward to Mysore and inward to the Self, or yoga body, presents a picture of a phenomenon from multiple angles. This symbiosis of inner and outer, the lived body and the subtle body animating physical form...and this as a result of movement within, movement without, gazing, chanting, breathing, rituals, prostrations, space and place, liminality, communitas, mobility and globalisation, commercialization and consumption make the lens of pilgrimage a most appropriate frame through which to view the practise of modern postural Ashtanga yoga. Expand the lens to include academic perspectives of inner journeying where the body is the vehicle and the site of religious expression, and yogic perspectives of inner pilgrimage which recognise the sacred inner landscape as “place” of pilgrimage where the body has the very real and palpable potential for being in service to the transcendent.

## CHAPTER 3: THE CONTEXT

### 3.1 Introduction

The object, yoga, as it is practised by Ashtangis, is explored in this chapter within the context of contemporary questing as a pilgrimage, by pilgrims. The lens of the pilgrim serves as a tool to elucidate the phenomenon and make sense of this physical pursuit as a one of transformation both physical and psycho-spiritual. Situating the Ashtangi in the spheres of the social, psychological and anthropological disciplines as they attack and unpack pilgrimage in modern day enlarges not only our understanding of the contemporary pilgrim and the contemporary pilgrimage both, but also through the use of these lenses, helps us make better sense of the possibility for transformation that begins with a physical practise of postural Ashtanga yoga.

In the following chapter we will situate the Ashtangi in the context of the social upheaval in late modernity, as it relates to secularisation and the birth of new forms of identity religious or spiritual or otherwise, while also exploring the metaphorical pilgrim as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman describes him in an era of “liquid modernity” : as a nomad creating his own individual narrative in a climate of uncertainty, instability, and dis-identification in which pain, progress and procrastination define him.

The archetype of the pilgrim from a Jungian perspective is scrutinized as a universal symbol of transformation, in which the psychic motivation is for a deeper knowledge of Self, in what several authors describe as a homecoming through venturing into an embodied wilderness. He is characterised by his his nomadism, his quest for authenticity, his attraction to novelty and his willingness to stand outside the mainstream. Finally, we will delve into several anthropological studies on pilgrimage which expose the context of pilgrimage as a rich tapestry of motivating factors and the themes which surface from these complex journeys of personal transformation. Subjective transformation through the recreation of narrative, movement, inner and outer performativity, ritual and healing, space, place and identity, homecoming and protest, miracles and *communitas* are themes these case studies all share. We probe pilgrimage as it defies the boundaries of its historical Western definition: pilgrimage has become a personal journey of transformation through movement, and appreciating the evolution of the pilgrimage sheds light on the evolution of yoga as journey home, as journey within, and as journey of transformation.

## 3.2 The religious climate: the sociological context of contemporary questing

### 3.2.1 The axial age

#### *The modern era*

Yves Lambert, French sociologist and author of: *Religion in modernity as a new axial age* (1999) claims that the modern era, beginning in the 1500's, was an "axial age": a critical turning point in society in which there was a general reshaping of a "symbolic field". This was a moment of global collapse in the general order of things, a restructuring of collective thought and beliefs and a reordering of political and social systems. The modern "axial age", he says, is a very clearly delineated movement across the broad spectrum of social, anthropological and political history.

The modern era ushered in profound change in religiosity and religious practise on a global scale, and with this age there have since occurred smaller mini-shifts, the most recent significant one occurring roughly 1960-1970's. But what has helped shape contemporary society are the features of modernity which have in turn created the religious effects we witness today, and which serve to illuminate the growth in popularity of modern yoga. Each one of the features Lambert designates as having had an effect, which in turn goes through a subsequent decline, an adaptation and/or reinterpretation, a conservation and then innovation. The value placed on reason, for example, led to individual liberty and following that a breaking with tradition in opposition to religion. Pursuant to which religion undergoes a sweeping reinterpretation, as modern reason is employed to redefine it from this new perspective, where ultimately reason itself becomes the very agent of religious innovation that caused its earlier decline.

#### *Vibrant and vigorous new forms of religion*

So in each of these features Lambert traces a pattern by which the very feature that challenged the sustainability of a religion has also assisted in its modern reincarnation. Reason, science and technology, emergence of the masses as well as globalisation, the development of the economy and functional differentiation (the division between the public and the private): all of these features have led to the decline of religion and its paradoxical re-emergence. The result of this paradox is the introduction of new forms of religion as well as secularisation. Lambert can find little to link modernity with a disappearance of religion, rather there are vibrant and vigorous new forms worth

exploring which share similar characteristics in an enduring appreciation for religious symbolism. These can be summarised as being of “this world” (religions celebrating being in this moment rather than attending to life in the after world); self-spiritualities empowering individual questing and emphasising the divine within and the inner Self as a mystical spiritual guide; “dehierarchization” and “dedualism” as a means of holistic and monistic unity and the god within; parascientific faith systems verifiable and accessible to all; as well as loose network type organisations such as healing groups and prayer gatherings. Finally there are faiths that are pluralistic, relativistic, fluctuating and seeking through a “supermarket” *bricolage* in a self-deterministic and personal explorative approach.

*“Believing but not belonging”*

Yves Lambert hypothesised that the modern age effected two basic changes in the way we interpret religion: on one extreme is secularisation and the other is the formulation of new expressions of religious belief. He explores in his article how modernity has led to a progression of effects over religion which has ultimately led to its reincarnation of sorts, so that it is still very much alive and breathing albeit in a way in which it has been liberated, and liberated those practising, from the overarching hierarchy of the traditional religious institutions. Westerners, whose primary form of “believing” is informed by Christianity, are, as English sociologist of religions Grace Davie proposes in her “believing but not belonging” thesis, believers no longer bound to religion by any institution. Lambert defines religion as a practise or belief that an individual considers to be a reality, so long as there is a symbolic relationship between them. The claims to truth, or empirical evidence, need not be proven.

*Autonomy from authority*

Secularization, he defines as autonomy from the authority of religion, both in cases where religious symbols remain salient or are entirely abandoned. Secularization is not the absence of the religious; it is the freedom from domination by the religious as an institution. He uses a rather awkward word, “autonomization” to describe the process of detaching oneself, and becoming autonomous of the influence of religious authority. He describes this more clearly by using Berger’s definition of secularisation: removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols, and unencumbered by religious interpretation.

Since the 1960's witness the sexual revolution, feminism, the destruction of the utopian dream represented by the dynamiting of Le Corbusier's American housing complex, the Cold War, the end of communism, globalism, the post-industrial information society, the internet; this contemporary era has been called "the post-modern era", "reflexive modernity", and "late modernity" to isolate but a few more popular different designations, but regardless, what remains important in situating the contemporary pilgrim and Ashtangi is the fascinating reconstitution of religious sentiment, observation and identity surrounding them, both constructed and reconstructed in a proliferation of mutations and formulations since then. Relevant in creating the context in which to situate the subjects are the myriad themes and discourses surrounding yoga as a "New Age" spirituality and hazarding to best understand the Ashtangi through the lens of contemporary pilgrim theories and pilgrimage theories both.

### 3.2.2 The "New Age"

#### *Sacralization of self*

"New Agers believe that the sacred resides in the deeper layers of the Self; it is only to be expected that they follow their personal paths, experiment freely with a range of traditions in a highly heterogeneous spiritual milieu. The diversity of the spiritual milieu results from, rather than contradicts, the existence of a coherent doctrine of being and well-being" (Aupers & Houtman, 2006). In their article *Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality*, the authors argue convincingly that New Age spiritualities are not as ambiguous a *bricolage* as they may seem on the surface: they may indeed be "*à la carte*" (Bibby, 1990) "communities reigned by individualism" (Hervieux-Léger, 1999) and acting like kleptomaniacs "with no clear reference to an external or 'deeper' reality" (Possamai as cited in Aupers & Houtman, 2006, p. 201), however the authors point out the superficiality of such an assumption, and they demonstrate their hypothesis through interviews with New Age teachers and leaders. At their heart, they claim, New Age spiritualities sacralise the Self. They cite Luckmann, who stated 40 years ago in *The invisible religion: the problem of religion in modern society* (1967), that he believed that through the erosion of the Christian monopoly religious consumers could "privatise" a personal syncretic package, and they respond to the theory with one of their own: that

New Age spiritualities, contrary to the preponderance of sociologists claiming otherwise, boil down to more than mere *bricolage*, and that they are indeed socially significant.

*One divine source*

This sociological orthodoxy of New Age theories of privatisation and *bricolage*, they claim, “is not much more than an institutionalised intellectual misconstruction” (p.202). Instead they demonstrate through the reintroduction of “perennial philosophy”, derived from esotericism and known best for its association to New Theosophy, that “all religious traditions are equally valid, because they all essentially worship the same divine source. Perennialism and its virtual omnipresence in the spiritual milieu can be illustrated with the following explanations by three of the interviewed New Age teachers” (as cited in Aupers & Houtman, 2006, p.204):

I feel connected with the person of Jesus Christ, not with Catholicism. But I also feel touched by the person of Buddha. I am also very much interested in shamanism. So my belief has nothing to do with a particular religious tradition. For me, all religions are manifestations of god, of the divine. If you look beyond the surface, then all religions tell the same story.

That is important: you can find spirituality in every religion [...]. In Christianity you'll find Gnosticism, in Hinduism it is the philosophy of Tantra, in the Jewish tradition it is the Kabbalah. The fundamentalist versions of religion are divided: only Allah, only Jesus Christ. But the esoteric undercurrent is almost the same.

For me it is easy to step into any tradition. I can do it with Buddhism from Tibet, with Hinduism, and I can point out what is the essence of every religion [...]. I am dealing with almost every world religion [...]. There is not one truth. Of course there is one truth, but there are various ways of finding it.

*Searching for authenticity*

They claim this perennialism which is at the heart of New Age spiritual discourse is the *lingua franca*, which they refer to as self-spirituality, and they refer to Paul Heelas who describes contemporary seekers as “gods and goddesses in exile” (Aupers & Houtman, 2006) on a quest to discover that from which they have been alienated: their authentic Self, indoctrinated as they have been by mainstream culture. The *lingua franca* is that we are spiritual beings and only by connecting with the sacred “kernel” at the core of each human can the ego be transcended to make way for the “Self”: “for the heart”. “A ‘mundane’, ‘conventional’ or ‘socialised’ Self –often referred to as the ‘ego’ – is demonised as the ‘false’ or ‘unreal’ product of society and its institutions

and contrasted with a ‘higher’, ‘deeper’, ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ Self that is sacralised and found in the Self’s deeper layers” (respondents as cited in Aupers & Houtman, 2006, p.205):

I experience god, the divine, as something within me. I feel it as being present in myself. I connect with it as I focus my attention on my inner Self, when I meditate [...]. It’s all about self-knowledge, being conscious about yourself [...]. It has nothing to do with something that’s outside of you that solves things for you.

I think spirituality is something that lives inside of you. It has a lot to do with becoming the essence of who you are and being as natural as possible.

I am god. I don’t want to insult the Christian church or anything, but I decide what I’m doing with my life [...]. There is no ‘super-dad’ in heaven that can tell me ‘You have to do this and that or else [...]’. I am going to feel!

### *Finding a path*

The theme of alienation, expressed as an identity-crisis and a sense of dissonance from their mainstream lives, careers and jobs, is one which, for some of the respondents, is ratified through participation or exposure to a “path” in which they were encouraged to explore their spiritual side through the acquisition of an alternative window of perception. A different cognitive frame and different experiences to inform and legitimise that frame together create a process of socialisation that belies old-school New Age theory that that the *bricolage* is socially insignificant; encapsulated by Steve Bruce’s claims in his *God is dead* (2002), as so diffuse as to be socially irrelevant and impossible to qualify.

Aupers & Houtman disagree with Bruce and find a wealth of material to demonstrate otherwise. Also socially significant is the emergence of what David Voas (as cited in Heelas & Houtman, 2009) calls “ ‘fuzzy fidelity’: an attitude of uncommitted but real interest in God and spiritual matters” (p.83). They explore in their *Research note: RAMP findings and making sense of the ‘God’ within each person, rather than out there*, the middle ground between atheists and agnostics versus church-goers: this intermediary space where “many forms of the sacred are to be found” (p.83). Eileen Barker, sociologist of religions and author of *The church without and the god within* (2004) helped create the questionnaire, the results of which the authors suggest, show that Europe “is undergoing widespread detraditionalization” resulting in a high percentage of “God within” respondents which they attribute to general socio-cultural change. In a similar exploration, Zinnbauer *et al.* attempted, in their 1997 article entitled *Unfuzzifying the fuzzy*, to assess participants

self-assessed spirituality and religiousness. Of the eleven different groups of believers, ranging from New Agers to Roman Catholics, those considering themselves New Age were the most likely to define themselves as spiritual and the least likely as religious, and Catholics the opposite placing them at opposite ends of the spectrum. Suzanne Newcombe (2005), who explores the “spiritual and religious beliefs”, in a sociological survey of serious yoga practitioners, concludes that the sample she studied are “engaged in a technique that attracts a significant number of people interested in a type of ‘spiritual exploration’ that can probably be best explained by the concept of ‘mystical religion’, as introduced by Ernst Troeltsch and developed by Colin Campbell. These findings provide new salience to the idea of ‘mystical religion’ and a starting point for considering the role that a physical practise plays in contemporary spirituality and religiosity” (abstract, 2010, p.305).

### **3.3 The Modern Pilgrim: sociological metaphors**

*“The future for studies of pilgrimage therefore looks bright, since it encapsulates the restless movement so characteristic of peoples in so many parts of the contemporary world”* (Segal, 2009, p.395).

#### *Liquid modernity*

Contemporary sociologist Zygmunt Bauman made waves in his field of study when he coined the term “liquid modernity” and “light modernity” to describe the contemporary age. Bauman has contributed numerous writings to the field of sociology, and he developed throughout the 1990’s theories which juxtaposed modernity with postmodernity, arguing that contemporary culture features modernist drives as well as those postmodern. If, as he summarises, the modern era is characterised by hope and promise, security and sedentarism, a willingness to work hard in anticipation of the fruits of one’s labour, then postmodernity is characterised by disillusionment and ambivalence, risk and nomadism, disenchantment and a desire for instant gratification (2013, 2003, 1999). Postmodernity is not therefore beyond modernity; it is, says Bauman, “modernity that has admitted the non-feasibility of its original project. Postmodernity is modernity reconciled to its own impossibility –and determined, for better or worse, to live with it. Modern practise continues –now, however, devoid of the objective that once triggered it off” (1999, p.98). Whether modernity or postmodernity, from Bauman’s perspective there is no defining line separating them,



rather “the point of his sociology is to have it both ways: modernity and postmodernity mix, and necessarily so in various overlappings and criss-crossings” (Elliott, 2013, p.10).

In contrast with some of his contemporaries who saw the end of the modern era pessimistically, and reduced contemporary man’s condition to one of detachment, loss of sensibility and scepticism in the wake of the deconstruction of the meta-narrative, overwhelming consumerism, saturation by the media, entertainment and new technology, as well as simulated reproductions of things real, to the point where the reproduction is seen as more authentic (“hyper real”) than the original (Baudrillard, 1994), Bauman preferred to see this period of late modernity as an age of uncertainty. Bauman introduced the catchy term “liquid modernity” and in doing so took a stance apart from the more popular postmodern radical disdain for the contemporary state of affairs. Social structures and conduct, once “solid” in the modern era, he posits, are now marked by an unsustainability [...] and they melt away, like Simmel’s perception of fashion as a means of creating an individualistic identity which dissolves as it is more widely embraced (as explored in Frisby, 1986). A self-imposed marginalisation as a means of creating an identity relies on differentiating oneself proactively; that precariously constructed identity is only stable so long as the “fashion” is not embraced by the mainstream.

Bauman analyses modern cultural practises and postmodern global transformations as they affect one another, and argues that the experience of space vs. time, of Self vs. others, creates a “liquid” experience of life characterised by ambivalence, uprootedness, anxiety, insecurity and ambiguity yet concomitantly “opening a space for the imaginative pluralisation of structures of meaning” (Elliott, 2013, p.11) while dismantling normative “truths”. Ours, he claims, in *Liquid modernity* (2013), is an age of “liquefaction” giving rise to short term market-oriented and episodic reconstitutions of the Self and self-identity unfolding against a backdrop of multiculturalism and globalisation. Add to that, that in the absence of religious survival strategies in the face of one’s mortality, the contemporary man reactively establishes himself as guardian of his physical body and cares for its health and well-being, while trying to overcome its limitations. One can see how control of the body, restless anxiety, lack of self-identity and the influence of globalisation and plurality have created an opening for a contemporary narrative which “gives meaning” in the tradition of Durkheim (1959), to one’s consumption, one’s physicality, and one’s need for individual self-expression while at the same time reconstructing an identity [...] however short

lived. “Knowledge is constructed, not discovered; it is contextual, not foundational. In this vision, truth-validation is explicitly recognised as entering into the pragmatics of inter-subjective transmission”, Anthony Elliott writes in *The contemporary Bauman*, interpreting Lyotard’s 1984 vision of the postmodern condition (Elliott, 2013, p.6).

*Subjective nomadism and the individual narrative*

Bauman proposes with his “liquid modernity” theory (2013) that we are a society perpetually and literally on the move in our quest for experience, displaying a sound commitment to seeking “movement” in directed outward momentum. Sedentarism is on its way out as the dominant form of living, and nomadism and mobility are fast becoming a favoured choice over being settled. The pilgrim is the “ultimate metaphor for the modern subject, constantly preoccupied with the building and sustenance of an identity through which he can give meaning to the confusing world surrounding him” (Bauman as cited in Coleman and Eade, 2004, p.135). He is constantly on the move, liquid, receptive to change to the extent that it will help him make sense of the world in which he feels uprooted. Bauman describes the contemporary seeker of self-identity as a pilgrim, his quest a pilgrimage; a ceaselessly cycling pilgrimage where the destination, either imagined or real, is forever and eternally just beyond one’s reach (1999).

*From adventurer to pilgrim: progress in procrastination*

The centrality of ambivalence in Bauman’s perception of the contemporary human condition is echoed by the lesser known contemporary of the three greats in Social Theory: Durkheim, Weber and Marx. Simmel, much like Bauman after him, does not seem to fit conventionally into the traditional rubric of either modernity or postmodernity, instead reflecting in his writing the very ambiguousness the era, to him, represented. Simmel, like Bauman, develops a snapshot of what he describes as the “adventurer”: a reflection of the modern man, a social type who longs to escape his mundane existence and participate in an activity with its own set of separate rules and norms. It is in his leisure time that Simmel’s adventurer longs to experience something exciting, different and self-transforming. Simmel was original in his perception of this longing for leisure time, this break from the mundane to give his life meaning, and the means in which he might express his “adventurer” personality through travel and perhaps some risk taking sports or outdoor activity (Frisby, 1986, 2002).

“Living life as a pilgrimage is therefore intrinsically aporetic. It obliges each present to serve something which is not yet, and to serve it by closing up the distance, by working towards proximity and immediacy. But were the distance closed up and the goal reached the present would forfeit everything that made it significant and valuable” (Bauman, 1999, p.3). The use of the metaphor of pilgrim by Bauman signifies this restlessness, this seeking of a destination that will help him make sense of himself and his purpose. If this contemporary pilgrim’s life is formless, episodic and fragmented as Bauman suggests, then the pilgrim believes that the destination in the distance will give it form, continuity and wholeness (Bauman, 1999). The history of the meta-narrative has come to a close in a period of modern and postmodern continuous change; the pilgrimage provides the pilgrim with a “symbolic order” in which to create his own individual and experiential narrative in his quest to realise the meaning of his existence. And so the pilgrim sets out on one journey-with-a-mission after the next with the hope that he will experience an exceptional and out of the ordinary event, which might radically alter and shape his life and bless him with a sense of newfound identity. But the “blessings” of the pilgrimage are elusive because he is, paradoxically, in a state of chronic procrastination.

Bauman discusses the origins of the word procrastination, and interestingly, points out that its original usage was to refer to time spent on pilgrimage when one’s mundane life was put on hold. *Cras*, he explains, was a Latin word which means tomorrow, and *crastinus* designates what belongs to tomorrow, or the future. To procrastinate therefore means to put off until tomorrow what should actually belong to the present. “The meaning of the present lies ahead; what is at hand is evaluated and given sense by what does not exist yet” (Bauman, 1999, p.3). He argues that the instrumental rationale for the pilgrim’s life then is paradoxically the movement toward the target while never quite being able to overcome the distance between it and himself. The modern pilgrim travels toward a destination promising greater fulfilment, but in the end he keeps travelling because were he to stop searching, his life would lose the meaning associated with the seeking; it is with the questing that the pilgrim most identifies, and becoming fulfilled would mean the end of the pilgrimage which defines his life. “Procrastination tends to become its own objective” (p.4), and in delaying gratification, procrastination retains the ambivalence which Bauman argues characterises the contemporary condition. Bauman makes reference to *thanatos*, the death instinct, and the *libido* as being both held hanging in suspense as the pilgrim plods along his course

of ever postponing the present he should be living, had he not put the present on hold to go on pilgrimage.

*Pain as symbolic: “la blessure délicieuse”*

Clinical psychologist Theodore Reik’s seminal book: *Masochism in modern man* in the compendium *On love and lust* (2002), in which he distinguishes the masochist as unique in his avoidance of the end goal: “his striving is to prolong the forepleasure or, what is more important, to avoid end-pleasure. Here masochism can be distinguished from all other perversions that also cling to the fore pleasure: in masochism the end-pleasure is shunned because it involves anxiety”. The tension of Reik’s masochist vacillates between the pleasurable and the anxious: this suspense, he says, is one in which there is no definite termination to this state; postponement and even renunciation of the end-pleasure define his experiences. Reik explores the “martyr attitude of modern man” and “the complicated nature of the human craving for suffering” (p.366). He emphasises that the masochist is driven to demonstrate to others the suffering he is subjected to: there is a degree of exhibitionism and parading of “their psychic concomitant phenomena” (p.235) and even “where there is no question of a perversion of the grosser meaning of the word, where masochism signifies an attitude toward life, this demonstrative feature is distinctly recognisable” (p.237).

There is a striking similarity in Bauman’s conception of the modern man as pilgrim to Reik’s modern man as masochist. Reik explains that where once the term masochism was restricted to a label used for a sexual aberration, it is now desexualized and has more popularly come to refer to an attitude toward life or a social behaviour characterised by an enjoyment of one’s own suffering. The delay of gratification, the physical and psychic pain, the deliberate submission to privations, the sacrifices willingly made are to be seen in the modern masochist and Bauman’s chronically procrastinating modern pilgrim both.

The instrumental rationality favoured and privileged by the pilgrim’s life prompts the search for such means as may perform the uncanny feat of keeping the end of the efforts forever in sight while never reaching proximity; of bringing the end ever closer while preventing the distance from being overcome altogether. Pilgrim’s life is a quest towards fulfilment, but fulfilment in that life is tantamount to the loss of meaning. Travelling towards the fulfilment gives the pilgrim’s life

its meaning but that meaning cannot survive the completion of the journey.  
(Bauman, 1999, p. 3)

### *Prolonging the promise*

But Bauman develops from this a modification brought about by contemporary consumer society, which has stretched this principle of procrastination, he says, to a breaking point so that the contemporary consumer insists on the delay of gratification and instant gratification concomitantly; the gratification, in order that it be perpetually delayed and simultaneously enjoyed, must then be perceived as impotent, and left discarded as not being able to quite live up to the promise it was thought to have held: “a gratification not really gratifying, never drunk up to the bottom, always abandoned half-way” (Bauman, 1999, p.6). He suggests the poles of procrastination, the distance between desire and self-denial is shortened and even potentially eradicated altogether: the bi-polarity on a fast cycling and repetitive circuit. The pilgrim’s target is in this case actually reached, albeit momentarily, then dismissed in the same moment as a new target is established.

## **3.4 The archetypal pilgrim: a Jungian interpretation**

*“In my case Pilgrim’s Progress consisted in my having to climb down a thousand ladders until I could reach out my hand to the little clod of earth that I am”.* (Carl Jung)

### **3.4.1 Juxtaposing the archetypal interpretations**

#### *A definition*

An archetype, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is a “primordial image, character, or pattern of circumstances that recurs throughout literature and thought consistently enough to be considered universal: it is a recurring pattern of motif, character, symbol, or situation manifest in mythology, religion, and stories across all cultures”. Literary critics adopted the term from Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the collective unconscious. Archetypes, Jung posited, describe universal patterns in human experience; they are motifs that help delineate psychic elements into images characterised as archetypal.

### *Psychic Motivation*

The archetypes are recognised only from the effects produced in infinite experiences of the same type, revealing themselves as a type of formula of human experience for throughout history. The commonality of archetypal themes suggests a “constant requirement in the human psyche for a centring in terms of deep principles” (Campbell, et *al.*, 1988 as cited in Taheri and Jalaly, p.2). The experience of being human can be examined collectively across time, space, and culture and traced to the most primitive origins of human consciousness where archetypal themes originate in modern men and women. Archetypes are the precursor to conscious thought, existing in the unconscious mind as expressions of psychic energy.

“The archetype provides form and meaning to the instinct, and instinct provides raw physical energy to archetypal images to assist them in realising the ‘spiritual goal toward which the whole nature of man strives; it is the sea to which all rivers wend their way’[...]”, writes author Murray Stein in his book *Jung’s map of the soul: an introduction* (1998) If the pilgrimage encapsulates the restless movement of the contemporary seeker, the archetype of the explorer/pilgrim helps in making sense of the psychological, and psychic motivation for, and experience of journeying.

### *Archetypes: inherently numinous pivotal points*

Stein (1998) qualifies the archetype as being of a numinous nature, described as “spiritual”, and insists that the phenomenon is of relevance and significance for the psychology of religion. He insists that the effects, when the archetype appear, are anything save indifferent, and the potential for altered consciousness when the ego comes across the archetypal image are powerful and palpable:

There is a mystical aura about its numinosity, and it has a corresponding effect upon the emotions. It mobilises philosophical and religious convictions in the very people who deemed themselves miles above any such fit of weakness. Often it drives with unexampled passion and remorseless logic towards its goal and draws the subject under its spell, from which despite the most desperate resistance he is unable, and finally no longer even willing, to break free, because the experience brings with it a depth and fullness of meaning that was unthinkable before.

The archetype, he says, reflects the authentic element of the spirit, and drives it dynamically toward an end vision, often producing elaborate rationales to justify the end goal and explain the psychic

process. The origins of the symbols, as Jung explained it in *The structure and dynamics of the psyche* (Papadopoulos, 1992), are the deposits of repeated human experience, which help make sense through recognition and assimilation of the world within, translating it into a visible reality. The appearance of the archetype in one's individual life, says Jung, is "the primordial image in the need of the moment [...] the suitable moment for this is always when a particular view of the world is collapsing, sweeping away all the formulas that purported to offer the final answers to the great problems in life". The individual who feels compelled toward an end vision, the symbol of any particular archetype, is being transformed by a sense of imminent change, "as though in contact with some mysterious and irresistible power or overwhelming compulsion, highly charged, numinous, life changing [...] meaningful and often (with) overtones of a 'religious' experience" (as cited in Clift, 2004, p.10). Jung defined such an experience as a being a "great treasure" for an individual, and very much a personal and subjective source of meaning and enrichment, experience and transformation.

#### *Novelty, nomadism, procrastination and marginalisation*

Carol S. Pearson, Jungian analyst and author of *The hero within* (1998), builds upon Jung's work on archetypes, with an aim to increasing the communication between one's conscious and unconscious mind, allowing for a better understanding of one's individual questing. Jung's explorer archetype, she says, is motivated by the compulsion to explore and experience the unknown, and his journey is one of transformation. He may brave loneliness and hardship in so doing, and is often oppositional and iconoclastic in his search for his own uniqueness and his calling. He is open to new perspectives, new cultures and change, and requires this transformative passage before being able to return to his mundane life with a deeper knowledge of himself, able to seek out new ways in which to use the newly exposed gifts and powers bestowed upon him on his journey. When the journey has been successful, the explorer returns to his life newly empowered, more independent and psychologically mature and balanced.

Carl Golden, Jungian counsellor, in his treatise *The 12 archetypes*, ([http://www.soulcraft.co/essays/the\\_12\\_common\\_archetypes.html](http://www.soulcraft.co/essays/the_12_common_archetypes.html)) says Jung's explorer archetype can be broken down further into categories of pilgrim, iconoclast, adventurer, seeker and individualist. All dislike being "fenced in" for they fear being trapped into a role of deadening, stultifying conformity and

inner emptiness and boredom. They all have at their core a compulsion to find out more about themselves by exploring the world in a quest for a more authentic and fulfilling life. The shadow side of the archetype is aimless wandering, procrastination, social marginalisation and isolation, unwillingness to settle down (chronic nomadism) and resistance to committing to a disciplined mundane existence. “By calling pilgrimage an archetype, we are saying that it is a universal pattern common to humanity throughout history, so some similarity in purpose of or in what generally happens to the individual seems likely, regardless of the particular destination and focus of the pilgrimage” (Clifts, p.42).

*Homecoming: soulwork*

Sarah York, American minister, in her book *Pilgrim heart: the inner journey home* (2001), echoes Jung, and refers to the motivation to journey as a compulsion of sorts. This urge to set out comes with its individual intentions, but most importantly common and universal features. She sums up the journey as being precipitated by a decision to find “home”, by first leaving home and then returning home. She suggests the motivation has, at its core, a desire to know one’s soul and feel one’s connection more profoundly to the numinous. She quotes a fellow pilgrim’s rhetorical question: “How do we know that God is with us? We know because we will be led to places we did not plan to go” (as cited in York, 2001, p.67). York explores the archetype of the pilgrim and across different religious traditions and his relationship with ‘home’; the Buddha and his disciples left his royal palace on a journey of self-discovery, Jesus employed his disciples to give up everything to follow him, and Mohammed fled into the arid desert to receive his revelations. There is a long historical tradition, across many belief systems, to go out in search of one’s Self. Western religion, she argues, has been replaced by science which cannot appease the longing inherent in human beings, for this desire to feel “at home”; we may look at the stars on a clear night, the constellations always the same, and yet there is always a desire to know that we are all part of it in a more meaningful way. This is the pilgrim heart, she says, the heart that yearns with a “holy restlessness” to know the soul.

“On this journey toward ‘true home’, though we may, from time to time, turn back to record or measure from whence we came, we do not turn back in order to turn back” . Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992, p.478), senior Jungian psychoanalyst and author of *Women who run with the wolves: myths*



*and stories of the wild woman archetype*, makes sense of “soulwork” as a homecoming, as a journey toward a source. She *uses* archetypal psychology to “de-pathologize the integral instinctual nature and to demonstrate its soulful and essential psychic ties to the natural world” (p.475). She uses archetypal images as a means of assisting in the conscious work of individuation and encouraging a recovery of one’s deep psychic instincts with an aim to awaken the soul. Psychology, she says, is in its oldest sense, a study of the soul which “began with anyone and everyone who heard a voice greater than their own, and who felt compelled to seek its source” (p.476). There is no one right way, she says, for one to move toward this goal: “regardless of one’s state, stage or station in life one must have psychological and spiritual strength in order to go forward [...] strength does not come after one climbs the ladder or the mountain [...] attention to and devotion to the nature of the soul represents the quintessential strength” (p.478).

*Mystical imagery: embodied wilderness*

Estés claims that from her experience, this strengthening is itself a journey; a voyage made via various means but originating from a numen. That this numen exists is “an incontrovertible fact”; it is a “greatness that rests at the centre of the psyche and yet is greater than the whole of the psyche”. This place in the psyche where the archetypal symbols meet is the “mysterious habitat of the instinctual or wild nature [...] in the older folk tales and writings of mystics, the entire milieu of the core is understood as being a life of its own”, symbolised “as either one of the vast elements such as ocean, vault of sky, loam of earth, or as a power with (archetypal) personhood” (p.479).

There is speculation, she claims, that in this psychic core is rooted the immune system, the mystical and all the archetypal images and urges both sacred and mundane; it is primordial, and “some would say the records of humankind” lie here in this “locus betwixt the worlds”, which is “older than the oceans. It has no age; it is ageless” (p.26), and it is the “crack between the worlds” where the supernatural blessings of great psychic wealth become possible. “One may be tempted to drown in the rapture of one’s time there [...]. How one is meant to return is wholly washed or (as) dipped in a revivifying and informing water, something which impresses upon our flesh the odour of the sacred” (p.27). We each have within us the potential to access this “river beneath the river” through “yearning and seeking” and the altered consciousness, which comes from journeying toward that goal which is more felt than understood.

From the core's "remarkable psychic sense of life", numinous sensations arise of "being filled with something not-I" causing "a sudden and profound awakening, changing, or informing of the senses, mood or heart of the human". The images and language that arise from these sensations constitute the archetype, which has the power to change one thing into another "in a way that is difficult and tortuous to accomplish by will alone" (p.480). Archetypes carry with them a rich tapestry of images, symbols and motifs for humankind; "archetype exists everywhere and yet is not seeable in the usual sense" and as such they provoke movement and change in the way a human might only sense an object in its periphery without being able to more clearly define his vision. This change is characterised by it's being both difficult and rich, she says, and that is what we find in authentic maturation: both inside and out, the person striving toward genuine transformation is challenged and enriched.

"Wilderness is part of every personal journey and part of our journey together as human beings who seek to live in relationship with one another and the wilderness of our vast and awesome universe" (York, p.76). York believes that to be a pilgrim means to enter that wilderness and to learn to be at peace with those things that haunt us, in our dreams and in our lives; we go on that journey to tame our fears. This taming is a struggle and often a process of confronting the unexpected and the unknown, both literally and metaphorically, and passing through a gateway, a threshold when we are vulnerable and when the "invisible spiritual world and visible reality come together". The author explores the Jungian concept of synchronicity, those coincidences between one's inner world and external events and the transformations made possible by such occurrences. Pilgrimage forces us to confront the challenges of nature, both without and also within. Pilgrimage can take us into the wilderness of our own inadequacies, our shadow side, and open us up to the changes we need to make to be more "at home" with ourselves. The themes of returning home, to the source, to the wilderness within, are strongly associated with the archetype, and allow for a perspective of the individual as having an inner world worth exploring, through a journey into the Self.

These archetypes of metamorphosis personify the process of seeking out new options; tearing down what no longer serves; committing to people, values, and activities; and creating new forms. They are expressed most often in individuals (adolescence, midlife, retirement, etc.) and organisations in times of transition, and all of them want to maximize personal freedom and fulfillment. When all four

are awakened within individuals or organisations, they become ready for The Return. (Pearson, <http://www.bsu.edu/classes/magrath/205resources> /pearson/pearson.html).

### 3.4.2 Testing the paradigm

Jean D. Clift and Wallace Clift (2004), Jungian counsellor and psychologist/theologian respectively, test the paradigm and concretely explore pilgrimage as an archetype in *The archetype of pilgrimage*. They say they came to believe that the insight Jung had on basic human personality gives psychologists of religion the language and tools to understand the spiritual passage: “these physical passings through apertures can print themselves deeply into us, not in our physical senses alone but in our spiritual sense as well, so that what we apprehend outwardly becomes part of the lasting geography of our souls. The pilgrim begins to awaken” (p.2). They conclude from their research that pilgrims on pilgrimage experience a sensation that is “difficult for them to put into words”: a sensation that “something deep within the spirit was touched”. This nucleus of meaning, at the core the archetype, is the invariable quality that, as a result of the effects produced, defines the archetypal image.

#### *Eliadian precepts*

The Clifts (2004) begin with the premise, as Jung does, that human beings are spiritual creatures. They make reference to Mircea Eliade’s differentiation of the sacred from the profane and the relationship human beings have with manifestations of the sacred: “hierophanies”, as Eliade coined them. Eliade, as well as being a renowned historian of religions, was also a scholar and practitioner of yoga, and he spent time in India with a guru learning about Oriental philosophy and religious traditions. Eliade drew comparisons between Occidental and Oriental perceptions of the sacred, and pointed out the significance of the symbolism of the sacred in everyday objects which, although meaningful to Easterners might not be considered so by those in the Occident; Westerners might even experience some “uneasiness” with such correspondences. Jung qualified the symbol as an object that participates in, rather than simply pointing toward, a separate reality; it is a crossing point toward between the mundane and the supernatural. “Symbolic language, we maintain, is the language of religion- and the language of pilgrimage (p.14).

### *Pilgrimage motifs*

The Clifts (2004) isolate some common motifs of the pilgrimage which they see as shaping the human experience which fits the archetypal pattern across cultures and religious orientation, and in both secular and religious expressions: difficulty of access, special clothing, water rituals, community on the way, leaving something behind, taking something home, and the sense of presence at the pilgrimage site. The symbolism of the site which is remote and difficult to reach, whether it be in some naturally inaccessible and distant location beyond mountains and sea, through winding paths, passes or tides, or whether difficulty is created through a ritual of access such as prostration, approaching barefoot or on one's knees; difficulty of access seems somehow to create merit. The authors suggest that "difficulty of access may be expressive or symbolic of the fact that all growth, all change in life requires effort, requires movement away from the place where we have been, requires a willingness to leave the comfort of the *status quo* behind" (p.69). Jung called this the process of journeying toward one's "individuation": the relationship with the "Self" is often remote, and the Clifts suggest that the outer journey is symbolic of the inner journey, even though one may not be conscious of this in undertaking a physical pilgrimage.

### *Symbolic clothing*

Special clothing is another motif of the pilgrimage: men and women, in some pilgrimages, wear a traditional costume or garment of distinct significance. Often this significance is a representation of purity, simplicity or a demarcation of one's being on pilgrimage. A staff, a prayer shawl or rosary, a sash, even baptismal clothing among Christians, leather for those on motorbikes or a military uniform for those pilgrims to the Vietnam Wall; the clothing is as varied as the pilgrimage, and is often kept as a memento of the transformative ritual of the pilgrimage, and may even, as in the case of those Muslims on the *hajj*, be brought back home and employed as a burial shroud. In Jungian psychology, clothing is considered to be one method human beings employ in expressing themselves and holding themselves out to others: clothing is symbolic of the transformative, liminal aspect of the journey, and when particular clothing is donned on pilgrimage this symbolises the aspect of crossing over implicit in the journey.

### *Communitas*

Community is another aspect of pilgrimage that the Clifts extract from the archetype. They make mention of the approaches that pilgrims take called the “pilgrim’s way” on which they claim to have observed “a sense of community or oneness with other pilgrims in walking the pilgrim’s way” (p.73). They claim this “special approach says: you are entering sacred space; whatever preparations are appropriate should be made” (p.74), and this shared journey reinforces values in common.

### *Sense of presence*

Yet another significant theme is what the authors refer to as a sense of presence. The presence is related to the sacred; whether it be a saint, a god, an avatar of god or a representation of a godly entity, the site itself is often believed to be imbued with that sacred quality, and in moving physically closer to the site itself, one is coming closer in contact with the essence of the sacred. “Pilgrimage sites are often in beautiful scenic places and there is a sense of the presence of God, or the gods, or nature, or the wonder of the universe that one senses there” (p.82). Jung, they say, accepted that religious experience could not be denied, for he who claims to have had one there is no need for evidence beyond his individual psychic reality. Jung viewed the psychic experience as “part of the data of human personality” and the presence at the site, as a numinous reality for some pilgrims that qualifies as a religious experience. The pilgrim is driven by his desire to experience something other than what he already knows; he goes on pilgrimage to enhance his life through the experience of something ulterior, something transformative.

### *Piercing the sacred energy*

“We accept the data on the face of the archetype to make sense of it and to understand it’s meaning...motifs point us toward that meaning” (p.83). If the pilgrim represents a universal pattern, then it would make sense to explore the other reasons many have for making the journey. The Clifts’ research points to several different motivating factors: to come into closer contact with the sacred as formerly mentioned, but also sometimes to return to a place where something momentous or significant has taken place. The birthplace of sacred figures, the locales where enlightenment or blessings were bestowed are often conceived of as places which embody sacred

energy: Christians follow the footsteps of Jesus and his mother Mary, Muslims go to Mecca in the tradition of Abraham and Ishmael and to Medina to view the site of Muhammad's pilgrimage, Buddhists travel to the tree beneath which the Buddha sat when he received the blessing of enlightenment and release from the wheel of life. Princess Diana's death place in a tunnel in Paris, the home Graceland in which Elvis lived in Memphis, the Vietnam wall commemorating the deaths of American soldiers in Washington DC, and the site of a park in New York City where polaroids are said to capture sacred images: the sites transcend time and modern history, but all carry some significance to those pilgrims drawn to them.

### *Healing and atonement*

Many pilgrims go on pilgrimage to achieve absolution or pardon for misdemeanours or sins. Others hope for a miracle: the intervention of some sacred force to heal or transform, to bring about a desired change or prevent one. A pilgrim may also go on pilgrimage, as recognition of thanks for what he believes was the "hand of God" in his life; it is an act of loyalty, gratitude and thanksgiving. Yet other pilgrims are motivated to undertake the journey as an act of devotion to, or love of the deity associated with the site. For some it is as undefined as a simple "sense" that a pilgrimage would be of benefit, experienced as a longing, a calling and even an urgency. The pilgrim may have little understanding of what drives him toward the pilgrimage, but he answers the call regardless, some promise of its benefit sensed. And for all those with very personal and intimate reasons for journeying, there are myriad others who are little more than curious as to why others are making the trip, or those who have a pressing desire to step outside of the routine of their lives and experience something less familiar and outside of the mundane.

### *Coming "home"*

Some are motivated to become pilgrims to reclaim aspects of themselves which they feel have become denied or suppressed, forgotten or abandoned. Pilgrimage can serve as a tool for getting in better touch with one's authentic Self, even described or conceived of as a sense of coming home to one's Self, both literally and metaphorically as a kind of homecoming. They may go to see the beauty of a natural wonder or one made by human hands, the migration of birds or whales, the turning of the leaves, the majesty of mountains and rivers and caves and sometimes the enhancement by human means of these natural phenomenon. Some will go on pilgrimage as a

means of enhancing their travels, some will go as a means of honouring a vow made in response to an “extreme situation” and others, as in the “long tradition in Roman Catholicism that one can win merit for the afterlife and reduce one’s time in purgatory after death by going on pilgrimage” (p. 59) in preparation for death. Hindus believe that even a few drops of water from the sacred river Ganges is to gain liberation from the bondage of the material world.

The Clifts explore both secular and religious pilgrimages, and the numerous intersections and similarities making it difficult to differentiate one from the other. They seem to classify all those pilgrimages to sites of musicians, politicians, popular figures unrelated to conventionally recognised religious affiliations as secular. Language, they say, used to describe the experiences associated with secular pilgrimages, often sounds religious, and the rituals of religious pilgrimage sites surround them. Traditional unification of church and state made religious figures of those in positions of political power, and the holiness or numinosity of any pilgrimage shrine seems to be more dependant upon the experience of the pilgrim than the conventional designation of a site as religious or sacred *per se*. Changes in the values associated with different pilgrimage sites are cultural, religious, temporal and social, and perhaps, as Jung claimed, related to the possibility that when God leaves a site [sic], he doesn’t return (Clifts).

### *The shadow side*

In Jungian tradition, there is indeed a shadow side of pilgrimage just as there is to every archetype. The shadow side, where passions run high and religious sentiment prevails, an us vs. others, mob psychology, xenophobia, believers vs. non-believers prejudice has been known to exist in holy sites and indeed horrible holy wars and crusades have led many to categorically reject pilgrimage as a spiritual undertaking. During the Protestant Reformation, pilgrimage was banned and attacks were made on shrines in an effort to put an end to the timeless practise. Martin Luther said there was no theological nor scriptural basis for pilgrimage, yet “pilgrims to the holy land continually speak of being moved, drawn, and startled by the sense of presence of scripture afterward” (p.116). Pilgrimage refused to be laid to rest even though the shadow side has brought with it horrible consequences. “Any high good, such as an encounter with the divine, can inspire a kind of selfish of mindless idolatry” (p.114). Idolatry of remains and relics was also seen by many to be a corruption of the practise of pilgrimage and considered a perversion of the sacred, as testifies the

devout Christian pilgrim Desiderius Erasmus in the 1500's with regards to the "counterfayte" idols at Compostela: "they be more pernycyouse, that set forthe uncertayn relyques, for certayne, and attribyte more to them than they oughte to have, and prostytute or sett theym forthe for fylthye lukre" (2005, p.28). Commercialization at the sites, while still a huge industry, led to the claiming of relics as authentic when they were not: dirt, water, wood, blood and hair but the most obvious examples of sacred items sold under false pretences. Pilgrimage has been said to create occasions for "sin": as pilgrims venture away from home, there is a sense of anonymity in the release from social ties, which although can be the necessary impetus for a transformative experience the shadow side is that opportunities may be created for myriad illegal and illicit acts of crime and depravity.

### *Primitive symbols and motifs*

In Jungian psychology motifs in dreams are considered a means of better understanding an individual; the symbolic imagery in our dreams can help give shape to inner and subconscious desires, needs, longings, and motivations of the Self. The motifs are often expressed in the language of mythology, this because these universal archetypes were projected onto even ancient stories and myths of gods and goddesses, and the Clifts claim that the motifs of pilgrimage commonly appear in the dreams of contemporary people. This provides them with the evidence that pilgrimage is archetypal: a pattern, which has a common shape of revealing symbols of journeying both inwardly and outwardly, the nucleus of which is the Self's quest for meaning.

### **3.5 Contemporary pilgrims: an anthropological portrait**

*"Practices of displacement are not incidental to, but actually constitutive of, cultural meanings in a world that is constantly 'en route'".* (Coleman and Eade, 2004, Introduction)

Contemporary pilgrimage studies have presented fascinating case studies of pilgrimages the world over which challenge all conventional theories and universalizing models of pilgrimage. While the Turners offered a glimpse at Christian pilgrimage and opened up a realm to anthropologists which had been largely ignored [...] as a result of their being activities "supposedly divorced from daily life" (Eade and Sallnow, 2004, p.3), the world of the pilgrim has been shattered open with the acceptance that sacralized travel no longer needs to be confined to the assumption that it is "by



definition, divorced from other aspects of social, cultural, or indeed religious life” (p.17). Focusing on the complex social, economic and political relations in contemporary pilgrimage, and the various ways and interpretations journeyers themselves conceive of their sacred travel, sheds new light on an enduring tradition. And if movement was largely missing from earlier modern paradigms, there was an acknowledgement that it was indeed a “kinetic ritual”. Coleman and Eade (2004), in their text *Reframing pilgrimage: cultures in motion*, present fascinating and unusual accounts of contemporary journeying with movement at the heart.

### **3.5.1 The “run to the wall”: a motorcycle pilgrimage “home”**

#### *Moto-kinetics: creating a collective narrative*

In Jill Dubisch’s study of “Heartland of America: Memory, motion and the (re)construction of history on a motorcycle pilgrimage”, we are offered an alternate perspective of journeying, a visceral movement of bodies, without there being any physical energy exerted by the pilgrim himself mind you, toward an end goal in very modern terms. Here the pilgrimage is a long and trying journey on the seat of a motorcycle, pilgrims making their way cross-country to a wall in the capital of their homeland. Their quest is one towards “a landscape of memory [...] in a landscape of home” (p.106), “the concept of home brings together memory and longing, the ideational, the affective and the physical, the spatial and the temporal, the local and the global. All of this in an effort to “realise a new, empowering identity”. The search is an individual quest for “healing and identity, while at the same time the creation of a collective narrative” (p.107).

#### *Subjective transformation: myriad layers*

The “Run to the Wall”, “promoting healing among all veterans and their families” ([www.rftw.org](http://www.rftw.org)) is an annual ritualised cross-country journey on motorcycle, from the west coast to Washington, D.C. It is conceived of by the participants as a journey with a mission, and many, says Dubisch, consider themselves pilgrims: The ride is a serious endeavour: lengthy and difficult. But the run “is also transformative: transforming meaning, transforming history, transforming the emotional state of those participating”. There is also a psychological transformation: “some would say a spiritual state induced by riding” (p.115). There is “hardship and suffering” says the author, and the physical pain is met in equal measure with no small degree of emotional and psychological

pain, this suffering being a potentially vital element of the pilgrimage. Confronting unhealed wounds is one of the motivations and effects, consciously or unconsciously, of those undertaking the journey. It is also one of the reasons why many others do not.

### *Communitas*

There is a shared and healing aspect of the journey, which Dubisch describes as an “accidental community of memory” (Malkki, as cited by Dubisch in Coleman and Eade, 2004, p.116), and suggests this evolves through the shared journey to become something more akin to *communitas*. The intensity of the trip evokes emotions that create an element of bonding amongst those travelling so closely together. It also evokes the “shadow side”, if you will, of “tensions and divisions, both structural and personal” (p.117), though, as per the rule of the ride: “no attitudes”, these tend to be put aside by the pilgrims as they remind each other of the deeper purpose for their journey: for the cause and the healing of the wounds of war.

### *Ritual and healing*

The “Run”, says Dubisch, “represents a liminal and stigmatized group, that is, bikers” (p.118). They set themselves apart from their mode of transportation, and they create rituals along the way, which are exclusive to this journey, and have symbolic meaning. These rituals assist in legitimising and even celebrating the pilgrim’s identity as both veteran and biker. One example of a ritual is a ceremony that occurs before a dinner served to the pilgrims en route in Arizona, where there is an empty seat at each table with an overturned glass, utensils and plate. The places represent the dead who will never return home to enjoy the privilege of breaking bread with their families. Another ritual is the stopping en route at the magnificent and “sacred landscape” of the New Mexico mountains *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* at Angel Fire. There is a war museum and a chapel, and the site is one in which many pilgrims have said began the process of healing. “The power of the site, a windswept valley surrounded by snow-capped peaks, is breathtaking” (p.120). In Colorado, the site of a campground becomes an opportunity for ceremony, which takes place at dusk and by candlelight; the names of the missing in action of the Vietnam War are called out and the pilgrims hold hands to form what they refer to as a “healing circle”. This healing circle is played out again in Kansas, where it is also referred to as a friendship circle, where meaningful patriotic songs, such as “American Grace” are sung.

*Homecoming, miracles and protest*

Dubisch quotes some of the pilgrims: “This is the welcome home I never had”, and “I thought I was just going for a ride. I thought I was just going for a ride!” (p.121). But the *Wall*, the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington, DC engraved with 58,000 names of American dead inscribed into black granite, is the destination and the emotional climax of the pilgrimage. There are individual rituals performed at the site: the laying of wreaths, the kneeling to recite prayers, the speaking to the dead and the making rubbings from the engraved names. And there are nurses there to assist the often grief stricken pilgrims, many of whom become emotionally overwhelmed with “the spiritual quality of this ostensibly secular monument”, and the “wall magic” at the site. This magic is the phenomena of feeling the dead person's soul through the physical touching of his name on the *Wall*, and the cacophony of voices some have claimed to have heard coming from it. Miraculous things happen there, and these “miracles” seem to create linkages between people at the site.

A paradox of American culture, says Dubisch, is that most people join a community to more fully realise their identity. In the Run, many bikers forge a new identity through their journey to the Wall. “Individual suffering becomes transformed into meaningful shared experience” (p.126). The new narrative for the veteran, as it is seen on t-shirts and banners in the form of the slogan “Forget the War, Remember the Warrior” which brings with it another contradiction: the veteran stood by his country during the war, and his pilgrimage to the Wall is one of homecoming, of being given the welcome back home he missed out on originally. The Run can be viewed as a social movement, which on the one hand reaffirms American values, while on the other, calls for government accountability. There is a t-shirt slogan for this too: “I love my country but I don't trust the government” (p.127).

*Performativity*

Nancy Wood (as cited, p.130), in exploring the collective memory, qualifies it as performative in that it comes into existence through activity. The temporal and spatial structure and sensibilities of the pilgrimage, a culturally familiar ritual pattern, have allowed for the creation, through the Run, of a vector of memory reflecting American culture, history and the ideation of home. The pilgrimage, in this case a secular one, can nevertheless be construed as a spiritual journey, and one

which “thus reveals pilgrimage as a creative invention that combines personal healing, political protest and the reconstruction of history and memory” (p.129).

### 3.5.2 The Mevlevi dervishes: embedded motion

In her study *Embedded motion: sacred travel among Mevlevi dervishes*, author Bente Nikolaisen explores the multidimensional movement of Turkish whirling dervishes. As part of a Sufi tradition dating back to the 1200’s and banned in Turkey in 1925, when all displays of religious tradition were restricted to the private realm, the dervishes, whose practise included performing their whirling ritual (*sema*) in lodges (*tekke*), found themselves without a venue in which to practise. As a result of Turkish secularisation, the Mevlevi must travel outside their homeland in order to enact the *sema*.

#### *Inner and outer performativity*

In the 1970’s, the Mevlevi made a journey to Paris to perform their whirling ritual. Since then various groups have travelled across the globe to perform in public. Travel, says the author, is an extension of sorts to the movement central to the spiritual tradition; movement in the context of the Mevlevi is multi-dimensional and two-fold. Travel is a continuation of the internal practise, which is a physical performance of using one’s body actively to bring about a cherished spiritual experience the dervishes describe as a “love for God” and a “unity with God” and “of being one with the deity” (p.94). “Situated at the heart of Mevlevi theology is not only travel through geography, *i.e.* travelling *to*, but also travelling of the mind- travelling *through*”. The embodiment requires the ritual performativity for its realisation and climax, and part of this ritual is “movement through geography”; the soul requires the body’s participation, in the form of both travel and whirling in order to move closer to the ultimate goal: union with God and “the higher goal of seeking knowledge” (p.91).

#### *Space, place and identity*

The Mevlevi engage in travel, movement from Turkey to other international destinations, so as to be able to perform their ritual whirling. Their outward travel can be motivated by the desire to visit a shrine or a sacred landscape, but often, says the author, this is influenced by a “basic wanderlust”. Their spiritual goals of higher knowledge are multifaceted: to travel to religiously

significant places (such as the Alhambra in Granada, Spain, or the Mevlevi lodges in Jerusalem and Cairo, while at the same time perform their *sema* and gain closer and deeper knowledge of God. These intentions are intertwined.

Having been stripped of their freedom to perform their ritual *sema* in Turkey in 1925, being free to do so outside of their country provides an opportunity to reinforce their religious identity, this no longer being a condition of place. Travel gives the Mevlevi an opportunity to legitimise their faith while at the same time, take control of it and in so doing make them political actors, of sorts. New spaces, many of them once secular, have given way to their lodges as they have reconfigured and transformed by the enactment of their rituals for new audiences. “Place is about doing as much as it is about being and bodily memories played an important part in the *sema*...through the performance of the *sema*, they actually transformed secular space into acceptable ritual rooms, sacralizing the secular structure but also sacralizing the ritual” (p.99). The line between sacred and profane is blurred, just as the distinctions between secular and sacralized have collapsed: “secularisation and sacralizing appear, therefore, to be parts of the same process” (p.103).

### **3.5.3 British Mormons: “Being there”**

In her text “*Being there*”. *British Mormons and the history trail*, Hildi Mitchell explores the relationships British Mormons have with their devotional history and how that relates to places, persona and texts. She suggests that in doing so we learn to appreciate the centrality of embodiment in their faith and that visiting sites of historical importance in the development of the faith is a way for them to “actively participate in their theology and cosmology”. History and theology are inextricably linked and “Mormons interact with the material remnants and reminders of their history through embodied memories of their engagement with the objects, buildings and narratives of their theology” (p.26). What becomes evident is that it is the embodied practise, which is the foundation of their religious practise, rather than belief *per se*.

#### *Place, history and “being there”*

The book of scripture for the Mormons is very much a story of the history of their faith and its development as well as of revelations that encouraged the Church’s founding father, Joseph Smith. The revelations are linked to the places where they occurred, thus sacralizing real and identifiable

geographical locations, which Mormons can visit and which permit identification with “their history”. They make a pilgrimage to bear witness. In the narratives of British Mormons journeys to Salt Lake City, the motif, the author contends, of “being there” is one which resounds most amongst the pilgrims: seeing the historical site in real life to enhance the authenticity of one’s faith. There is a general feeling that simply by being there, through one’s participation at the site, something beneficial would be conferred upon the visitor.

### *Performativity and embodiment*

The “historical myth”, as the author calls it, of Mormonism, is one in which believers can participate. They do so through what Mormons refer to as “testimony bearing” on a monthly basis, where participants testify to the truth of their gospel as it has revealed itself personally to each. “In bearing testimony [...] the link with the origin myth and thus with the community is made not merely as a metaphor or narrative, but as a bodily feeling” (p.31), says the author. She quotes one Mormon’s testimony and the affect that led to her “knowledge” of truth as one that began with an emotional reaction, then a yearning and ultimately a conviction based on physiological and emotional responses. This affect is fundamental in both gaining the testimony and its narration, and is continually “reconstituted” and reinforced in the emotions stimulated through others testimonies.

### *Communitas and ritual*

“The shared experience of the community of Mormon believers has its pinnacle in the Mormon temple experience” (p.33). Mormon temples are unlike chapels in that they are neither open nor reserved for Sunday service; temples are reserved for secret, sacred rites and are tightly restricted to members performing them. In some of these rituals particular garments marked symbolically with temple symbols must be worn, and movement throughout the temple, which is built to represent the cosmos, is a symbolic movement of the individuals own progress through the cosmos. Initiands claim that participation is an intensely spiritual experience. “Temple rituals depend for their effectiveness on embodied recollections of previous experiences as well as on reports from other participants [...] through the adoption of certain clothing and behaviour, thus ensuring their bodies are ‘taught’ to feel certain things that Mormons believe are indicative of belief” (p.34). The author questions whether the performance produces belief as a socially informed construct, as

opposed to belief as an ideological construct. The rituals seem thus to create a “truth” rather than revealing one.

### *Embodiment*

Embodiment, clarifies Mitchell, does not fall into the categories of more popularly explored anthropological perspectives. It is neither confined to being socially constructed, nor is the body symbolic of the social. She suggests the Mormon body is the subject of Mormon culture, relying on affective responses rather than intellectual comprehension of doctrine, and that “truth” is experienced in the body at an emotional level. Through ritual the body is then appropriated by the faith having already been informed by a “feeling”: “through control of bodily attitude in the performance of a ritual, and in regulation of bodily behaviour” (p.35); through suspension of more natural bodily reactions, a “metamorphosis” of Self is effected.

### *Interacting with objects*

Although not the sacra we are maybe more familiar with at pilgrimage sites, there are nonetheless objects of value for the Mormon to explore in Salt Lake City. Computers with touch screens and video presentations, re-enactments, portraits of the founders, reconstructions of the wagons used on the original voyage and artefacts. Interactions with the artefacts allows for an experience of having “been there” and “seeing for oneself”, in the same way a pilgrim enters into a physical conversation with his environment. To be able to see some of the actual objects worn and used by the original Mormons gives the faith credence and authenticity. Both reproductions and the originals bear significance, sacralizing history.

### *Faithbuilding secular travel*

The author aims, in this exploration of British and American Mormons relationships with the history of their faith and the things and places associated with it, to demonstrate how secular travel can serve to build faith. Mitchell does so by arguing that inasmuch as “social memories construct history” the embodied memories are also significant in provoking religious feeling and enabling an overture into the history and myths of the faith. The sacredness of the faith in this case therefore depends, she posits, on “the recapitulation of a repertoire acquired from their own experience and from reports of participant in similar events” (p.43).

### **3.6 Partial conclusion**

In situating the Ashtangi in the context of contemporary questing we are offered the perfect example of the reconstitution of a vibrant and vigorous new form of the religious. Characterized by a “believing but not belonging” in a search for authenticity through a personalised autonomous path and conceptualised by one divine source, the pilgrim, through the sociological lens, is one who creates his own subjective narrative. Movement is often at the heart of that narrative, and the recreation of identity and the search for motivating factors.

In juxtaposing the archetypal interpretations we see how the symbolic pilgrim represents an inherently numinous pivotal point in an individual’s life when novelty and exploration, the longing for meaning, transformation and growth provoke a need for a deeper relationship with the Self. To know the Self one must explore a wilderness of unknown territory which beckons in sometimes in a powerful and magnetic forceful insistence upon the psyche. This journey is characterised by mystical imagery and a sense of presence of “other”, and in practise can be seen to include experiences of *communitas*, healing and atonement, primitive symbols and a potential shadow side.

Contemporary portraits of pilgrimage reveal more complex and varied themes with movement at their foundation. The visceral power of kinetics, the potential of inner and outer performativity and the myriad layers of subjective transformation and narrative both collective and individual, demonstrate the importance of this timeless tradition of questing in contemporary society. The *communitas* experienced through shared ritual and healing, shared space, place and interaction and embodiment and the protest, all reinforce the lens and widen its scope.



## CHAPTER 4: THE LENS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will explore the lens of anthropological pilgrimage studies from a theoretical perspective. The examples in the previous chapter help create the context for the theories which we explore in the following chapter, as perhaps the richest and most diverse contribution to present day understanding of the diversity of the pilgrimage experience. Pilgrimage, deeply rooted in Western culture as a physical conversation between body and spirit, and used here as a referential lens of kinetic journey of transformation, may shed light where shadows prevail in Western perceptions of modern postural yoga, exposing it as the potential spiritually transformative practise it has proven to be for some dedicated Ashtangis.

As recently as last year, doctoral anthropological studies of Ashtanga documented the powerful effect of a ritualised practise for creating a liminal experience in adherents (Bouchard, 2013; Langøien, 2013). While these projects provide palpable evidence of a practise of transformation, there nevertheless remains a potential *perceptual* stumbling block in Western understanding as to how to make sense of the phenomenon. The proposed lens of the pilgrimage, through which to view the physical practise of yoga as a spiritual endeavour, may help elucidate the concept of a physical practise of postural yoga as a potential spiritual quest.

We will begin with Durkheim and the Turners' 1970's landmark study which challenged the notion of pilgrimage as supportive of cultural and social structure. The Turners look at the ritual of pilgrimage, conversely, as being anti-structural. They explore the pilgrim's processual ritual as rites of passage, liminality, transience, wilderness and *communitas*. They compare the ritual in the tribe vs the ritual of pilgrimage, isolating the themes of place, exposed sacra, individual growth, anti-structure, individual healing, free will and the far off as being unique qualities of the pilgrimage as a liminal experience.

There was some quite confrontational backlash against the Turners' assumptions, and their anti-structural paradigm was put under the microscope by anthropological pilgrimage scholars who attempted to deconstruct the Turners' assumption of an implicitly assumed *axis mundi*, and following that, a movement away from paradigms focussed on structure to those focussed on

movement. The breadth of interest in pilgrimage by scholars continues to remain lively and animated, as does the interest in contemporary society and culture, to move, journey and explore the consummately seductive transcendent.

#### **4.2 Early structuralist theory**

Pilgrimage, the act of travelling to and through a place where divine power is believed to reside, is a practise, which in Christianity, goes back to the fourth century and possible earlier. Today, millions of pilgrims visit sacred sites each year. The popularity of this ancient custom remains unwavering, and the way in which historians, sociologists, theologians and anthropologists have approached the phenomenon has undergone some interesting developments.

##### *Structuralist*

Beginning with Durkheim, the approach to the pilgrimage was that it provided structure. The evidence that Durkheim had collected on Australian Aboriginal rituals, as providing “coherence and cultural integration of such societies as against popular misconceptions of primitive anarchy and infantilism” (Eade and Sallnow, 1991, p.3) became the wellspring for pilgrimage analysis and the popular paradigm for analysis of religious cults. Pilgrimages, seen as large scale cults by anthropologists, were also believed to instil in pilgrims a more developed self-identity, one which was broadened and newly-informed by Durkheim.

##### *Anti-structuralist*

Victor and Edith Turner challenged the structuralist perspective when they proposed their own (anti) Structuralist theory: the anthropologists proposed that there was a dismantling of the structured hierarchical society when a pilgrim took on a journey and existed outside his mundane life as a result of being on pilgrimage, and experienced in so doing a *communitas* tending toward a state of equality and coherence across cultures. Modern pilgrimage studies most classic text, “possibly the most influential text in the anthropology of pilgrimage” (Coleman and Eade, 2004, p.1), is Victor and Edith Turner’s (2011) *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture*. The stories in this text are about the varieties of physical motion, which make up the pilgrimage: a journeying in which the possibility of social and psychological transformation occurs through what they posit is a series of transitions in and along a quest for an encounter with the divine. They call this

questing a “kinetic ritual”, which becomes a rite of passage in a place-centred journey toward a sacred *axis mundi*. Their premise is one in which all individuals ultimately seek a connection with the divine, and through pilgrimage are afforded, and rewarded the possibility.

If Christian pilgrimage has indeed at its core “the inward movement of the heart” (Turner, 2011, p.8), one cannot help but speculate, given pilgrimage’s deep roots in the Western world, that its use as a lens to clarify and make sense of the transnational and postural yoga that is Ashtanga: “the journey to the heart” (Langøien, 2013), might prove a very enlightening tool for unpacking the mystery of yoga’s booming popularity worldwide. “While monastic contemplatives and mystics could daily make interior salvific journeys, those in the world had to exteriorize theirs in the infrequent adventure of pilgrimage. For the majority, pilgrimage was the great liminal experience of the religious life. If mysticism is an interior pilgrimage, pilgrimage is exteriorized mysticism” (Turner, 2011, p.7).

#### **4.2.1 Turnerian analysis and the processual form of ritual**

##### *Rituals and symbols*

The ritual, as it was understood by the Turners (2011), is a formalised series of prescribed actions and behaviours with reference to “beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (p.243) and ultimately culminating in some degree of transformation in the individual. Rituals are integral to the process of socialization, allowing people to adjust to internal transitions as well as those external and environmental. The ritual consists of a system and its symbols. The system is transmitted as a collection of rites and is expressed “in terms of all the five senses”, and the symbol as a small “unit” in that ritual system which will influence the subject through its association with any number of actions, relationships, words or gestures. There are different varieties of symbols; some more central or pivotal than others, and of these some are ideological while others are sensory (oretic).

At the sensory pole, the sensorily perceptible outward form of the symbol can arouse gross desires and feelings which are felt bodily and emotionally more than understood intellectually, representing what they refer to as universal experience. The sensory experience of a signifier is deeply physiologically stimulating, with “links with the unconscious”. When these dominant, central symbols, which are experienced as embodying some unknown power from an unknown

source, combine the sensory with the ideological in the ritual process, “norms become saturated with emotion, while gross and basic emotions become ennobled through social values” (p.247). These symbols, when experienced sensorily, have the power to inform, transform and enrich lives.

### *Rite of passage*

The Turners refer to work of French ethnographer Arnold van Genep (2011), who in 1908 in his ethnographic exploration *The rites of passage*, reported on the cultural phenomena of ancient and tribal societies. His research was aimed at exploring how these societies conceptualised, as well as symbolised the transitions inherent in human experience, and which he believed a human being would necessarily make over the course of his life. The Turners explain van Genep’s rites of passage as a transition marked by three phases: the first stage is a separation, which is symbolic behaviour signifying a break from a fixed structural point in one’s society. The second stage is marked by a margin, a limen in which one’s state becomes ambiguous; one passes through a dimension, a realm that has few if any of the same attributes of the past state and the future state both, with no familiar lines of classification. Finally there is the stage of aggregation in which the passage is consummated and one returns to one’s mundane existence. The first stage is therefore one in which the subject is removed from his mundane world, the second stage is the marginal and liminal stage and the final stage in the return to society transformed inwardly and outwardly both.

### *Liminality*

Genep explores liminality as an obligatory social mechanism that marks the transition, within the mundane sphere, of an individual's movement between one state and another. It is the ambiguous mid stage dimension in a religious process in which there is also potential for what may ultimately be, but is radically unlike both the past and the coming state: “he is betwixt and between all familiar lines of classification” (p.2). Genep, say the Turners, identified a transformative dimension of the social when he described the liminal stage of the ritual. “Liminality is now seen to apply to all phases of decisive cultural change, in which previous orderings of thought and behaviour are subject to revision and criticism, when hitherto unprecedented modes of ordering relations between ideas and people became possible and desirable” (p.2). Pilgrimage can be qualified as being quasi-liminal, for it is voluntary, open, optational and rarely, in contemporary Christian practise, conceptualised as a religious obligation. Pilgrimage, according to the Turners,

represents the “quintessence of voluntary liminality” (p.9) in the paradigm of the Via Cruces (Christ’s submission to God).

#### *Transience and wilderness*

This aspect of the ritual can be best understood as a kind of nomadism or movement. In the dissolution of structure or between structures, the subject is uprooted and moved into a new state of experience. This threshold of liminality can be compared to a state of being both in the wilderness and in utero, of being dead, invisible or enveloped in the complete darkness. Through discipline and the ordeal, social structure dissolves and one is liberated into one’s nature and open to the influence of the sacred. They suggest that when both time and space dissolve, the numinous is experienced through symbols and myths of one’s culture.

#### *Communitas: social anti-structure*

The Turners call this “commonness of feeling, where separate but similar individuals with similar emotional dispositions converge”, *communitas*. *Communitas* is a collective effervescence, central to religion, where symbols become recharged through the emotional impact of rituals, resulting in a “spontaneity of interrelatedness, the spirit which bloweth where it listeth” (Turners, 2011, p.32). This is a bond of comradeship which arises spontaneously through a shared relational communion; it is a liminal experience which the Turners qualify as “undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, extant, non rational, existential, I-thou [...] spontaneous, immediate, concrete, not abstract [...]. It does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms [...]” (p.250).

### **4.2.2 Pilgrimage as a liminoid and quasi-liminal experience**

*“Both for individuals and groups, some form of deliberate travel to a far place intimately associated with the deepest, most cherished axiomatic values of the traveller seems to be a ‘cultural universal’ ”.* (Turners, 1978, p.241)

#### *Space vs. place*

The anthropologists discuss space and place and the importance of space in tribal liminality and the seclusion of even ordinary tribal members in a particular sacralized place. This liminality of being set apart from the community experienced by all those initiands as part of the rite is in sharp contrast with “historical” religious tradition. In such traditions, liminality, insofar as it included

seclusion, was limited to clergy, monks and nuns. Only a very small segment of religious worshippers experience the liminality of seclusion while ordinary worshippers do not, in contrast with the large numbers of those in tribes. Christianity, the Turners claim, evolved its own form of liminality for the laity in the form of pilgrimage, a journey to a sacred place, secluded as it were, from their mundane lives. And for those without the means to remove themselves physically from their domain of labour and residence, surrogate pilgrimages became an affordable alternative.

*Secret sacra vs fully exposed sacra*

The pilgrim's journey is often an arduous undertaking, physically and emotionally taxing to the extent it may even be considered a penance of sorts, or a price paid for the blessings of the pilgrimage itself. This may assist in the creation of what the Turners describe as an "initiatory quality" to pilgrimage, and they claim the pilgrim is an initiand entering into a deeper experience than he has otherwise known. In the pilgrimage the sacred religious objects are exposed to pilgrims of all faiths alike, versus the tribal rituals in which the sacra is often reserved for those, and only those who have performed the ritual. But they claim nevertheless that the pilgrim's most concealed sacra are within: "what is sacred in the Christian pilgrimage, then, is the inner movement of the heart" (p.8).

*Social status vs. individual growth*

The moral unit in the pilgrimage is the individual, whereas in the tribe it is the social organisation; the importance of the individual in the pilgrimage is paramount. They describe the pilgrim's quest as a journey primarily motivated by the desire for a "deeper level of existence", in contrast with the tribal initiand whose goal is more likely an increase in his social status. Whereas the goal in the tribe is to raise oneself up in the echelons of social hierarchy to gain personal legitimacy, recognition, power and to be ultimately venerated, the goal of the Christian pilgrim is for salvation from the mundane and the sins of this world in preparation of, and acceptance into the afterlife. The pilgrimage is an initiation into a more involved and committed participation returning to his mundane existence but having taken a step forward.

*Structure vs. anti-structure*

In the tribe there is proscribed structure, in the pilgrimage one is free to explore life without one's familiar structure. The pilgrimage, as per the Turners, is an anti-structural and individual assertion of one's individual desire for spiritual growth. It is spontaneous, individually articulated, populist journeying that enjoys a much broader degree of flexibility than the ritual of tribal societies. One escapes, in pilgrimage, the everyday and its demands, and cuts across geographical, cultural and social boundaries to explore the deeper sense of one's Self released from the mundane obligations of one's existence.

*Communal affliction vs individual healing*

The theme of healing in the pilgrimage is explored, and the Turners compare tribal "rituals of affliction" with the pilgrim's journey of healing. In the tribe, illness can be borne by an extended member of a family, mediated through one to another; the ritual is to bring others within the circle with the belief that they have the potential to cure. It is not the individual alone who bears the wrath of God's punishment for sins but rather the community who is responsible for his own salvation. In the pilgrimage, the individual goes out to be cured without expecting that he will necessarily be remedied, voyaging toward the destination with the hope of being healed. A parent may undertake a pilgrimage in lieu of his child in order to pay for the affliction of an innocent child. The pilgrimage is more individualistic when contrasted to the tribal community.

*Magic vs. free will*

In the ritual, the element of magic underpins the ceremony, by contrast the pilgrimage is anti-magical as it depends upon the exercise of free will of both the pilgrim and the divine power, even where there are magical beliefs in the curative powers of water, relics, and images. The rituals in tribes reinforce the social in the context of healing, and in pilgrimage the journey towards the healing cure serves only to reinforce his individuality.

*Social vs. communal*

There is however, from the Turner's perspective, a community of individuals, which comes about through the shared experience of being a pilgrim. "All religious rituals have a strong effectual

aspect, whether this be mutated or displaced or given full liturgical expression”, culminating in a charged emotional state amongst the “congregants” and which for pilgrims “derive from the union of the separate but similar emotional dispositions of the pilgrims converging” (p.13).

#### *Near vs. far*

In the Christian tradition the pilgrimage is an initiation into a deeper level of religious participation. By travelling somewhere afar, one is able to look beyond the entanglements of one’s mundane attachments at home. By removing oneself and journeying to a far off place, the “elements and structures” of one’s religious practise or observation have the potential to reveal themselves in a different light: less bound-up-in the-domestic-world. It is travelling afar that one receives the spiritual blessings of spiritual growth.

### **4.3 Structuralist paradigms: contested**

*The essential heterogeneity of the pilgrimage process, which was marginalised or suppressed in the earlier deterministic models of both the correspondence theorists and those who adopted a Turnerian paradigm, is here pushed centre stage, rendered problematic [...] if one can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one can no longer take for granted a uniform definition of “pilgrimage” either. (Eade and Sallnow, 1991, p.3)*

Anthropologists Eade and Sallnow, in 1991, published a collection of articles written primarily by anthropologists with a focus on Christian pilgrimage. They asserted in doing so that the traditional structuralist paradigms, which share the same foundations (in which pilgrimage either subverts or supports the social order), are simply unable to serve adequately in what can now be better understood as a forum for competing discourses, some secular, some religious in nature; a confluence of myriad orthodoxies and religious meaning, and opposing drives between *communitas* and separateness. “The theoretical discourse about pilgrimage becomes more diversified and discrepant, being less concerned to match empirical instances with a preconceived ideal-whether analytically or theologically inspired-than to deconstruct the very category of pilgrimage into historically and culturally specific behaviours and meanings” (p.3).



### *Deconstructing the axis mundi*

Eliade's thesis in *The sacred and the profane: the nature of religion* (1959), was one which spoke to the Turners and in turn heavily influenced their paradigm. Eliade posits that the sacred is where heaven and earth meet and there exists this opportunity for one to pierce the transcendent and timeless divine. The Turners appropriated this ideal for religion, and pilgrimage, that there be at its heart and at the heart of every shrine for pilgrims a sacred centre. While the Turners explore pilgrimage as very much place centred sacredness, those contesting this precept explore the different conceptions of holy places and conclude otherwise. "Place-centred sacredness, then, besides being capable of construction in quite different ways, is but one modality of the localization of divine power encountered in pilgrimage cults. Person centred sacredness might precede it empirically" (Eade and Sallnow, p.8).

### *Contesting the sacred*

Eade and Sallnow's anthology provides instances in which the sacred place is simply the medium of the sacred geography, or the sacred place is only conceived of as such because it is a physical locale that mediates the inherent holiness of a person. In some cases it is the living body of the saint associated with the shrine which casts holy energy into another human body making it more accessible and furthermore, responsive, and yet in another example, the divine is journeyed toward through a text. All of the contributing scholars "implicitly or explicitly contest" the Eliadian precept that the shrine's power is "internally generated", and that its symbols are inherent; indeed they stress that contrary to the *communitas* paradigm, the shrines amplify discrepant discourses, acting as they do as "empty vessels" reflecting back pilgrims diverse assumptions. Their findings are, conversely, that the shrine, far from being *sui generis*, is a space in which, and to which, pilgrims impose their own respective discourse. The sacred centre, assuming so many different forms, therefore necessitates a different method of analysis in pilgrimage studies: "person", "place" and "text" they suggest, need to be considered in unison in Christian pilgrimage as well as other scripturally based religions.

#### 4.4 A movement frame

*“Thus we learn that Hindu mystics and some Sufis have developed the concept of the inner pilgrimage by which the person visits sacred places within the microcosm of the mind and body. This concept provides what in Western terms appears to be a metaphorical sense of the journey, though one that is rather different [...]”.* (Coleman & Eade, 2004, p.14)

##### *Movement*

If indeed “person”, “place” and “text” should be considered as important components in contemporary pilgrimage studies, so too should movement. While contesting the Turnerian paradigm, most of the authors of *Contesting the sacred* focus on place. The emphasis is on arrival and dwelling at shrines in this contestation paradigm, and movement is the missing fourth axis in making sense of contemporary questing; movement, “endemic to many current processes of culture formation” (p.5), is the focus of Coleman and Eade’s *Reframing pilgrimage: cultures in motion* (2004). In the contributions to their edited collection are the perspectives of the “kinetic ritual” as embodied, imagined and metaphorical, exploring not just the arrival to the “place”, but the movement to, from and at the sites themselves. The editors propose that the frame, in both Turnerian and contestation theories, would benefit from a broadening of the categories of movement which constitute pilgrimage; some of them religious, some secular.

*“Reframing pilgrimage* proposes a radical new agenda for pilgrimage studies, considering this form of travel as just one of the twenty first century’s many forms of cultural mobility”, and offering a new theory of pilgrimage as “a form of voluntary displacement which constitutes cultural meaning in a world constantly *“en route”* (cover). The editors make reference to myriad sources and attempt to both delineate the pilgrim from the tourist and traveller, while at the same time showing how much they overlap. They also point out the difficulty in defining the notion of journey, and the issue of geography. They suggest pilgrimage be interpreted within a more diverse understanding of movement:

- (1) movement as a performative action can effect (sometimes unconsciously) social and cultural transformations;

- (2) as embodied action corporeal testing, or pushing one's body physically, can bring about transformative bodily experiences;
- (3) movement as part of a semantic field rather than as a category, looked at within the context of its social and cultural landscape;
- (4) movement as a metaphor (as in some traditions of yoga and Sufism).

“Within the macro-context of the political economy of travel and the globalisation of (religious) cultures, dynamic interplays between transnational, national and regional processes may be evident. Theorizing around themes of mobility and movement can also be located within, and integrated with, micro-level examinations of the embodied motion inherent within pilgrimage practises, combined with analyses of the sacred geographies and architectures that provide the material and symbolic background to such motion. In such cases the focus on pilgrimage as ritual and performance is to the fore, with it involving sometimes unpredictable encounters between liturgical forms, personal imagination and memory translated into acts of the body” (Coleman and Eade, 2004, p.17).

#### **4.5 Partial conclusion**

The diversity of theories surrounding the study of contemporary pilgrimage serve as a reflection of the diversity of the experience. The act of physical journeying in quest of meaning is a universal theme, and the motivations behind the journey, as much as the qualities inherent in the journey, are as personal in contemporary culture as we permit them to allow. There are however some themes which continue to resurface in contrasting the most recent research, and certainly ritual, liminality, symbols, *communitas*, *sacra*, healing, free will and individual growth are some of those which are not only the most salient, but the most useful in situating the Ashtangi as pilgrim.

And if indeed the “movement” frame is only one way of viewing pilgrimage in relation to wider social theory, it provides an opportunity to explore the way mobility intersects with myriad cultural and religious contexts. One connecting theme, across all contributions to the collection in *Reframing pilgrimage* is the “diverse process of the sacralization of movement, persons and/or places” (p.18). In employing the term sacralizing as opposed to sacred in recognition of the fact that the characterisation of holy is often contested and incomplete for the pilgrim, the editors

(Coleman & Eade, 2004) nevertheless conclude that journeys that are all about journeys, transforming history into both myth and ritual. Broadly conceived of, in the light of Turnerian theories, contestation theory and postmodern theory, pilgrimage encapsulates a wide range of travelling with purpose.

## CHAPTER 5: ASHTANGA YOGA THROUGH THE LENS OF PILGRIMAGE

### 5.1 The sociological lens

One of the more notable perspectives amongst sociologists of religion is the picture of religion in metamorphosis and movement, with vibrant and new forms of religious expression and sentiment making their way into contemporary society. Individuals are confronted not only by a loss of sense and meaning in the collapse of traditional collective religious structures, but with a concomitant exposure, and perhaps even a sense of need, to engage in new belief systems and novel ways of expressing their beliefs. “Believing but not belonging” (Davie, 1994) has provoked an outward looking empowered individual and personalised questing, and this exposure to overwhelming freedom of choice in one’s pursuit of meaning has created, claims French sociologist of religion Danielle Hervieu-Léger, the ideal-typical pilgrim and religious convert. These actors, as she sees them, are in movement with the tides of religious currents; they are mobile and fluid. If one uses the analysis of the modern religious pilgrim as described by Hervieu-Léger in her *Le pèlerin et le converti* (1999) as a grille to look at the pilgrim, and then as a lens through which to look at the modern Ashtangi, one cannot help but appreciate how clearly the Ashtangi comes into focus.

Autonomy from authority and sacralization of the ‘Self’ are expressions distinctly contemporary. The New Age search for authenticity is all about the freedom to choose the path which speaks to one most powerfully as an individual while giving one’s life meaning and value; in contemporary Western society, this path can be one which attempts to reunite body and soul, much as has pilgrimage. Whether this is motivated by a Western “collective memory” of Christian pilgrimage, which existed historically as one of the very few outlets in which the body was recognised as a valuable tool in the pursuit of the religious, remains a plausible possibility; perhaps Ashtangis are unconsciously restructuring the religious by reinscribing this very element of movement into their contemporary practise. Or perhaps the drive to associate the physical with the spiritual has roots far more primal. Whatever the reasons, if religion is metaphorically in movement, so also are the numbers of both the (metaphorical and literal) pilgrims in a society and culture in movement.

Hervieu-Léger describes religious individualism as an individualism which incorporates ritual and practise; personalisation of religion has become, in contemporary society, an anti-structural pursuit

characterised by freedom and voluntary participation. This a very personal and subjective questing with a focus on the “god within”. This pilgrimage lens brings into focus not only the story of pilgrimage, but the story of Ashtanga. The ritual of the Ashtanga practise, the sequence of prostrations/salutations, always observed in strict order and according to an almost “religious” protocol, is one which depends upon the voluntary participation of those who identify as Ashtangis and serious yoga practitioners. If the guru of their practise has made of Pattabhi Jois and his lineage the “priest” of Ashtanga, it is the experience of something interior which is at the heart of the spiritual aspect of Ashtanga. The religious pilgrim and the Ashtangi are both on a journey to discover what resides within; through outer action, inner transformation is experienced.

Modern individualism establishes the autonomy of the individual at the centre of his existence. Modern religious individualism recognises the personal accomplishment of the individual and the potential that exists for transformation as a product of his interaction with the world around him. The Ashtangi, in his yoga, is the only one capable of bringing about his own accomplishment, the discipline and rigour with which he follows his rituals, and the dedication and intention with which he pursues his practise are the most important variables in his accomplishment.

Contemporary social theory in the study of religion characterises the contemporary seeker as a pilgrim, says Hervieu-Léger, practising a “nebulous esoteric mysticism”. There are a multiplicity of different groups of seekers with their own individual symbols, their own methods for seeking out the “God within”, unique to each. But the similarity across these social groupings of like-minded pilgrims is their focus on a perfection of the “Self”, a more meaningful, authentic, genuine existence accessible through psycho-corporeal practises of embodiment, integration of the body and mind, improved health, well-being, vitality and beauty. How this relates to the renewal of the religious in the contemporary social environment is in that distinctly modern intersection of the old with the new; the reincarnation of aspects of certain historical religions and the way in which they influence the modern ideal of melding the physical with the mental, the psychological with the spiritual. The modern pilgrim’s quest recognises the importance of the lived metaphysical experience as a self-inspired, self-propelled individual transcendence. The Ashtangi equally makes his focus that of his “Self” and the perfection of “Self”, seeking, through the mastering control of his body the potential of that sublime state of accomplishment, sometimes conceived of as a spiritual deepening and other times little more than a deeper stretch in *asana*. But only if

he can master his body does he have the potential for moving beyond it and into himself. The body, as in the pilgrim's experience, is the key to the experience of something more profound, whether it be physical or spiritual, but it is a journey that recognises the ultimate importance of the body's implication through kinetic motion.

The contemporary pilgrim can believe without belonging to one's traditional devotional social or cultural historic. The contemporary pilgrim may indeed, as the Ashtangi demonstrates, remind us that belonging nevertheless remains equally important. But to what one belongs, to whom one belongs is free to each and every believer to define as his whims may lead him. The modern Ashtangi does certainly identify himself with his practise. He relates to a constellation of symbols associated with his practise in determining his identity as an Ashtangi. He may be very conventional in his rejection of his history in favour of his own system of validation for his beliefs, and equally so in his claims to freedom to determine the path to his own transcendence. But much like the pilgrim through his choice to venture out toward something outside of his mundane existence, the practise of Ashtanga represents something to the Ashtangi that marks his individuality and makes him unique.

The contemporary pilgrim, says Hervieu-Léger, looks to his own subjective and personal experience for confirmation of his individual, meaningful experience. He stumps out his own path toward his transformation in search of a recentring mutual exchange; he looks for validation amongst his new peers in the milieu of the community into which he has engrossed himself. Hervieu-Léger makes reference to the mystical spiritualism explored by Troeltsch as being important and relevant to contemporary religious "pilgrims". In a reinforcement of the utility of this exceptionally compatible lens of pilgrimage, Hasselle-Newcombe, in her survey of English women practising Modern Postural Yoga, concluded that the best description of the spiritual experience relating to the practise of yoga amongst her subjects was to be likened also to the mystical experience such as had been described by Troeltsch. The lens of pilgrim serves as an illuminating interdisciplinary tool which converges multiple like theories reinforced from different disciplinary angles: sociologists recognise the modern quest as synonymous with that of the pilgrim on a path to a mystical experience using Troeltsch as a reference point; anthropological researchers of the phenomenon of postural yoga likewise recognise the same mystical motivation

in the yoga practitioner as the modern “pilgrim” (citing Troeltsch), while psychology provides depth to the psychic aspect of the quest.

According to Troeltsch, the realm of the spirit resides within the individual. Every individual has the potential to experience this internal spiritual presence. This belief is founded on the concept of the existence of a divine presence within the physical human creation. This reinforces a conception of an experience beyond dogma, of a sentient subjectivity, sensitive to the here and now rather than something to experience after death, in an alter world. The modern pilgrim can reject conventional Christian doctrine, with the relief, and belief that his transcendence is possible in this world, this life rather than in the afterworld; he has the power to bring about an experience in his temporality, in his present. This mystical typology crystallises the principle of individuality in religious pursuit and expression, very much characteristic of modernity.

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who also argued that the idéal-type of seeker in contemporary Western society is best represented by the archetypal pilgrim, again, helps craft the lens and bring the Ashtangi into clearer focus. Detachment, loss of sensibility, and scepticism is a result of the instability and fluidity of contemporary society, he claims. Living in this “liquid modernity” means that our identities are crumbling alongside the institutions we once looked to to make sense of our lives, and our existence. Social structures and conduct, once solid in the modern era, are no longer sustainable. Norms and means are changing shape rapidly, making us “tourists” in search of that fleeting experience. He conceptualises his pilgrim as distinct from the tourist in that he remains open to experience, but is driven by the desire for some greater meaning in his experience (1996). His identity is formed by his rejection of all convention, and association with the alternative. He marginalises himself intentionally as a means of creating an identity which refuses to conform to the mainstream. Bauman looks at these cultural practises and transformations as they influence one another, multiculturalism and globalism a strong influence; while dismantling normative truths and exposing more clearly the myth of religion, the individual is left to face his mortality, his temporality, alone. So he establishes himself guardian of his body, recognising at least the truth of its existence, and cares for it while also trying to overcome its limitations. “For those who have lost faith in religious authorities and grand political narratives, and are no longer provided with a clear world-view or self-identity with these trans-personal meaning structures, at



least the body initially appears to provide a firm foundation on which to reconstruct a reliable sense of Self in the modern world”. (Chris Schilling as cited in Langøien, 2012).

An opening for a contemporary narrative which gives “meaning” to one's consumption, one's physicality, one's psyche, and individual self-expression through control of the body helps explain the pilgrim as a metaphor for the modern seeker. Through the lens of the contemporary pilgrim, the Ashtangi looks to find meaning as the religious, cultural and social traditions crumble around him. His psychic need, to make sense of himself, or his “Self” and identify with something else outside himself as well as within becomes a search for meaning which expresses itself through his yoga. It is the reflexive ways in which people relate to their bodies that can be seen as one of the defining features of high-modernity His sense of belonging is cultivated through his discipline and practise. This choice of practise, recognised as being uniquely challenging by those who practise yoga more seriously, further reveals his individuality by that from which he marginalises himself from: the generic, the mainstream, the frivolous. He is a Bauman's ideal-type pilgrim: using movement in search of meaning, as a tool for self-expression and self-transformation.

If the contemporary seeker is plastic and receptive, he is nevertheless looking for that unique experience to express outwardly his individuality; like the pilgrim, he strives to set himself apart and creates his identity through rejection of the mainstream in an identification of the “Self”, but as it relates to others. In so doing, he is constantly restless and refuses to stay in one place, literally and metaphorically, for too long. The goal is always out of reach in the practise of Ashtanga yoga, much as it is for Bauman's procrastinating pilgrim in his postponement of the end-pleasure: the practise is never perfected, there is always a compulsion to move deeper into the practise and into the ‘Self’. The Ashtangi and pilgrim both keep up the never-ending pilgrimage because the destiny is never realised.

As Bauman's pilgrim constructs his identity through context and conscious directed movement in search of the experience, truth-validation for the Ashtangi is correspondingly based on inter-subjective transmission. He moves, quite literally, toward the goal, toward the experience, every time he unfurls his mat, whether in a special destination in his home or one as foreign as oceans away. He is characterised by subjective nomadism, seeking movement in outward directed momentum. The Ashtangi is the pilgrim who associates himself with an alternate practise which

makes sense of his physicality, which recognises the sacred element of his body, it's beauty, its power, it's potential for eliciting an experience beyond mundane. The Ashtangi is the pilgrim in pursuit of his interiority, his individuality, his empowerment, where Bauman's destination remains elusive and forever just beyond one's reach; for "were the distance closed up and the goal reached the present would forfeit everything that made it significant and valuable" (1999, p.3). This destination, in the practise of Ashtanga, of perfecting one's practise, is so beautifully elucidated by Bauman's exploration of procrastination in the pilgrim.

If the original usage of the term procrastination was to refer to time spent on pilgrimage, where *cras* meant tomorrow and *crastinus* designated what belonged there, in the future of tomorrow, then procrastinate means to put off until tomorrow what should alternatively belong to the present. Bauman argues that the pilgrim makes sense of his present by what does not exist yet. If, as we previously explored, the instrumental rationale for the pilgrim's life is a paradoxical self-propelled movement towards a target which is actually unattainable, then it is the purposeful withholding of climax which defines him, rather than the attainment of that end goal. The pilgrim intentionally, whether consciously or unconsciously, chooses a destination he prefers never to reach. Reaching that destination would mean the end of the pilgrimage which defines his life.

Similarly, the Ashtangi knows how elusive is the attainment of perfection in his practise. It is the struggle to reach perfection which gives meaning to his practise and to his life. The end goal is a consummately unreachable target, and so the pilgrim in him enjoys the "climb" knowing all the while he will never reach the summit. Because the practise has as its goal perfect practise, not enlightenment nor transcendence, the primary goal, measurable and palpable, is perfection of practise. In one's impotence to attain the climax, as it were, one is left with the ongoing edgy tension between climax and forepleasure. Bauman himself introduces psychological terms to describe the pilgrim's condition: citing *thanatos and libido*, or the death and life instincts, as being left suspended in a state of chronic procrastination, which for all intents and purposes suggests a masochistic quality, a martyrdom inherent in the procrastination which defines the contemporary pilgrim.

Theodore Reik, albeit a psychologist, helps clarify Bauman's venture into psychology in his interdisciplinary sociological exploration of the pilgrim. He explains the death and life instincts

as they relate to martyrdom, and what he also sees as a martyrdom in modern man. He describes this state as one involving a certain element of exhibitionism, a demonstrable quality of expressing to others the suffering he is subjected to. Even where masochism is desexualized and conceived of as a simple attitude toward life, this demonstrable quality, he argues, is recognisable. There is a vacillation between the death and life instincts, an edgy interplay between pleasure and pain and the ultimate renunciation of the end-pleasure. Through the lens of Bauman's pilgrim again we are afforded a perspective of the Ashtangi which begins to make ever more sense. His yoga is a physically gruelling practise, the positions he attempts to get himself into are largely acknowledged as painful. He learns very often to push through the pain, to continue deepening his posture and therefore never to entirely overcome the pain accompanying the practise. His pain is a physical marker and indication of his pilgrimage, both to himself, to everyone practising alongside him, and those who are made familiar with his identity as Ashtangi. "Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga is notorious for inducing pain. The postures provoke patterns of tension in our bodies, and when we pull against them, they scour our nerves...proper alignment is the result of an internal, mental rebalancing. It requires that we surrender the ideas, attitudes, expectations and prejudices that interfere with our ability to settle into the poses and take deep, full breaths" (<http://tylandrum.com/ashtanga-and-pain/>) Surrender and breathe deeply, for no pain is no gain.

The contemporary pilgrim will reject the "meta-narratives" of Western traditions while dismantling normative truths in favour of creating an "à la carte" reality through inter-subjective transmission. The pilgrimage, both gruelling and pleasurable, provides a break from the mundane yet can concomitantly be conceived of as a recreational outlet and an extremely lucrative one at that. Like the pilgrimage sites, which can create enormous revenues for the institutions supporting them and the hawkers of all related souvenirs and simulacra, yoga as it is practised in the West begets surprisingly similar commercial benefits. There is a logic to the consumer market, and the pilgrim builds his identity in close connection to that. The fascination with modern yoga, and the Ashtangis identity as receiver and projection of that fascination, comes clearly into focus when viewed through the lens of the contemporary pilgrim.

## 5.2 The psychological lens

Author Humphries of *Yoga Philosophy and Jung* (in Werner, *The Yogi and the Mystic*, 2005) completes the circle between Jung's pilgrim, mysticism and Yoga as the vehicle in the quest for meaning: "In language reminiscent of the Upanishads Jung declares that the inner world of the Self is as vast as the outer universe" (p.142), he says. The archetype of the pilgrim can be recognised by the effects produced from countless experiences of the same type; providing form and meaning to the psychic instinct motivating his desires, his urges, and his perceived needs. This archetype is motivated by a psychic desire to know one's soul more deeply, to go into the "wild" both within oneself and without, and to both provoke and realise transformation to some degree. And when the pilgrim goes on pilgrimage, as the Ashtangi into his practise, it is a performative undertaking in which he is seeking meaning and enrichment often at the cost of suffering and hardship, physical endurance and displacement; he will have to call on his physical and psychological strength to assist him along the way.

In psychology, while the frame differs, the pilgrim is conceived of in much the same way as he is to the sociologist: in the broadest terms, he is as an explorer seeking meaningful experience. While the sociologist explores the influence of society on the motivations for going on pilgrimage, both literal and metaphorical, the psychologist explores the influences of the psyche in giving life to the impulse. The pilgrims in both these scenarios are seeking an experience, and for some this will require a process of embodiment, of a physical undertaking.

The archetype of the symbol will make itself present when the psyche's needs rise to the surface. Archetypes are the unconscious and instinctual agents of our motivations and actions. An individual will feel the arrival of the archetype as a suggestion of action, but more often as a screaming necessity; he will not likely be able to ignore its insistence on being recognised and acknowledged. This is because this archetype represents a need in the individual which has been ignored or repressed, and although it may have resided in the individual's unconscious for a any length of time, the present has created something that has opened his unconscious brain just enough to allow the symbols of his deeper needs to rise up into his conscious brain.

The archetype, however primordial and universal, will speak to an individual in his own particular symbolic language: in an image he recognises. The archetype is, as we explored, recognised only

from the effects produced in infinite experiences of the same type, revealing themselves as a type of formula of human experience throughout history. This lens of pilgrim is the lens through which we are better able to understand the psychological impetus for adventure. “Explorers are authentic, fulfilled, curious, individual, unique, ambitious, autonomous and always true to themselves” (<http://www.inspectorinsight.com/archetypes>), yet they are often also described as iconoclastic and oppositional in search of their independence and self-actualization, willing to sacrifice comfort and stability throwing caution to the wind. Their psychic impetus is discovery, the experience of a more authentic and fulfilling existence, calling upon their innate freedom to explore the world. Fearing what they may be either actively feeling or what they risk feeling: trapped and boxed into a life of conformity, their orienting focus is on freedom, exploring their own uniqueness and their personal calling. The archetype of the pilgrim symbolises a human metamorphosis; the pilgrim is deconstructing what no longer holds meaning or value for himself in his inner life, and possibly his outer life as well, and he is driven by a force to create new forms and options from the discoveries he makes by exploring both the wilderness, and his inner wild.

As the Clifts explored, this nucleus of meaning of transformation and growth at the core of the pilgrim archetype is the invariable quality that, as a result of the effects produced, defines this archetypal image. Beginning with that very nucleus then, let us turn the lens on the Ashtangi. “The yoga body as such tells the story of a personal transformation in bodies and minds in an interchange between the ancient philosophies of India, human bodies, and the disciplined practise of yoga” (Langøien, 2012). Interpreting most literally the meaning of transformation, we can begin with what normally also marks the beginning, or pivotal motivation for taking on an Ashtanga practise. Transforming one’s body will typically describe the initial motivating factor for taking up a yoga practise, the participant might consciously decide to participate based on his desire or need to become physically fit, thereby transforming his physical state to one more aesthetically or physically in line with his ideals. The initiatory phase of this archetype of the pilgrim acts as an impetus for transforming one’s mundane life by introducing the physically beneficial influence of a physical practise as transformative. As the practise evolves, so will one’s definition of transformation.

As Langøien argues in his doctoral thesis on Ashtanga as an embodiment of a religio-spiritual practise, through his participant observation and extensively conducted research with interviewees

(2013), the ritual/routine of yoga as a practise evolves through practise itself; the practitioners as they evolve in their practise “tend to be more susceptible to the more encompassing philosophical and religious moorings of the practise” (2012). The transformation is physical, but evolves to become philosophically and religiously meaningful. The lens of the archetypal pilgrim serves again to help crystallise the nucleus of meaning for the Ashtangi in his practise.

If one of the formulas for human experience is encapsulated by the pilgrim, a pilgrim who has as his psychic impetus a movement toward inner discovery and the experience of a more authentic and fulfilling existence by calling upon his innate freedom to explore the world, so the Ashtangi can be better understood as employing this very archetypal formula in his practise, if we pause to observe his motivations and their effects. The effects produced through these motivating factors retain so much in common as to be able to reveal themselves as being archetypal. The theory of justification for focusing, in the modern world, on the asana aspect of yoga to the exclusion of other yogic means, is that it is the “easiest” way to begin a yoga practise. For the reason that the history of yoga and the fundamental philosophical and theological concepts at its foundation are beyond comprehension to the vast majority of Westerners; the aspect of asana as the entry point into the yogic spiritual tradition, despite the fact that it makes up only one of the eight limbs of classical yoga, becomes the limb with we can most easily relate. In pilgrimage it is much the same way, the initiatory impetus is to take up the journey and actively set oneself along a path. The potential is sensed but only realised through engaging in the process.

Westerners can understand movement as it relates to spiritual journeying as an archetypal pattern that transcends distinctions between ages; post-modernity, high-modernity, pre-modernity, the medieval age, it matters not insofar as our basic ontological conceptions are concerned. The understanding of pilgrimage, and the archetype of pilgrimage has a symbolic meaning that is deeply rooted in Western culture. The pilgrimage has always had at its heart movement; Westerners are not unfamiliar with the Christian tradition of a physical journey as a palpable and significant means of experiencing transformation. The tradition of yoga, however little understood by most practitioners in their preliminary stages of practise, becomes more consciously appreciated, as well as appropriated over time. So while there may be a conscious drive for transformation, this develops into a discovery, in a sense, of the world and of the psyche. The

pilgrim explores new territory by exploring a gamut of sensations on his journey that might be very new to him, and the Ashtangi does also.

A deepening practise is a deeper experience with one's body, and an intensification of understanding of the philosophies that this yoga associates with that augmented experience of oneself, and one's "Self". As the practise unfolds, the Ashtangi journeys further into his body, coming across new sensory impressions and experiences, and he creates new understandings of those sensations based on how he associates them with this practise itself, which is a foray into a corporeal embodiment, a culture, a philosophy and a spiritual tradition quite novel by Western standards. And if modern man has become more self-identified with his body by contrast to those of many of generations before, then the movement inherent in the physical practise of pilgrimage helps make sense of its explosion as a contemporary pursuit, and its use and relevance as a lens through which to view Ashtanga.

But the journey, to the pilgrim, is also more than what he can measure with his conscious brain. For the archetype is primordial and represents the timeless records of humankind lying in the "crack between the worlds", as Pinkola Estes posits, where the supernatural blessings of great psychic benefit become possible. She reminds us that we each have within us the potential to access this "river beneath the river" through seeking, and the altered consciousness, which comes from journeying toward that goal, which is more felt than understood. Langøien points out that as "physical as the Ashtanga practise may be, many of its practitioners do experience changes that can be termed "spiritual" and that the healthy and fit body actually may become a signifier of spiritual growth as well as of physical strength" (2012).

From the core's psychic sense, numinous impressions arise of being made replete with something alternate, causing "a sudden and profound awakening, changing, or informing of the senses, mood or heart of the human" (Estes, 2010). The images and language that arise from these sensations constitute the archetype, which has the power to change one thing into another, varying a great deal in detail images, but nevertheless without losing their basic pattern of symbols and motifs for humankind. York believes that to be a pilgrim means to enter that wilderness within and without, and to go on that journey to tame our fears, confront the unexpected and the unknown, both literally and metaphorically, and pass through a threshold "where we invite the invisible spiritual world

and visible reality to come together”. Pilgrimage can take us into the wilderness of our own inadequacies, our shadow side, and expose us to the changes we need to make to be more “at home” with ourselves. If the pilgrim seeks a “presence” as the Clifts argue, where one returns to the location in which there is believed to be an opportunity of becoming closer to the sacred, then the Ashtangi can again be more clearly understood through this lens; he seeks a presence and that presence has a mystical embodied quality. He returns to the site of his body again and again to put himself in contact with that sacred element. He is also very literally a pilgrim in classic terms when he journeys to Mysore to the source of the path within. Maya Burger, describes the yogic pilgrimage succinctly and accurately when she does so, as a multi-layered phenomenon.

### **5.3 The anthropological lens**

Early structuralist pilgrimage theory contends that the pilgrimage is a means by which the pilgrim brings into focus his self-identity, developing a greater awareness of himself and his relationship with his spiritual yearnings through the process of ritual. Durkheim’s theory was that the pilgrimage provided structure and cohesiveness to the cult, and pilgrimage, studied from this perspective, was seen as a large scale cult. Through the lens of the Turners paradigm we view the issue of structure somewhat differently; the pilgrimage is a pursuit which sets the individual outside his social structure in what has been likened to a suspension of time, which permits the pilgrim the opportunity to develop a greater awareness of himself through a variety of “procrastination”. He sets aside his mundane life, experiencing respite from hierarchical society, meeting people from all walks of life on his journey, while potentially enjoying a *communitas* with people sharing the similar experience of pilgrimage.

The Ashtangis relationship to, and with, structure can also seem paradoxical. His practise may create structure in his own personal life, yet his identification with being an Ashtangi may also serve to differentiate him from the mainstream, allowing him to marginalise himself, and in effect to create an identity for himself as individual and counter-culture. If there is indeed an *axis mundi* to be reached for the Ashtangi, as the Turners posit is at the heart of every pilgrimage, the sacred place as the destiny, the journey for the Ashtangi may be both “exteriorized mysticism” and “daily interior salvific journey” both. The Turners claim that the pilgrimage is “the inward movement of



the heart”, and Langøien, who studied the embodied Self of Ashtangis in Mysore, entitled his PhD thesis: *Pay attention, listen to your heart*” (2013) to describe the practise of Ashtanga Yoga.

There are rituals which the Turners’ pilgrim undertakes in the pilgrimage to mark his transition from past to present, these being integral to the process of transition. To the Turners these are a formalised series of actions and behaviours with reference to “mystical beings or powers” and which play upon the senses. They note that when the sensory and the ideological are combined, as they are in both the pilgrimage and the practise of Ashtanga, the experience can be transformative. The movement of the pilgrim: his transience, is critical, for it uproots him and moves him into a new state of experience. Ritual movement is equally critical to the Ashtangi who experiences a spiritual change. The Ashtangi walks a sacred path through his *asana* and *praxis*, he moves within. Through that lens Ashtanga might also be conceived of as a cult with its own specific rituals which provide stability and structure individually to the practitioner, helping him cultivate a sense of Self through his anti-structural behaviour. Many practitioners express a sensation of crossing a threshold when they enter that place, mentally and physically, where they release themselves into their practise, into their inner world, into their bodies and hearts, to perform their ritual, and this beyond the bounds of their mundane existence. The numerous instances of *communitas* experienced and documented assist us in drawing a parallel between this Turnerian lens of pilgrimage and the Ashtangi’s anti-structuralist movement away from the conventional and mundane life both, to share an alternate reality amongst others like him. He recreates his own structure through the dismantling of the conventional. He does this, as does the pilgrim, on a meta-social and cultural level, while concomitantly on a micro embodied level.

The Turners describe the pilgrimage as a series of transitions in and along a quest for an encounter with the sacred. It is questing as a kinetic ritual: a rite of passage in a place-centred journey. Their premise is that all individuals seek some kind of connection with the sacred, and through pilgrimage are afforded, and rewarded the possibility. For the Turners it is “the inward movement of the heart” (Turner, 2011, p.8); pilgrimage as a lens to clarify and make sense of the transnational and postural yoga that is Ashtanga: “the journey to the heart” (Langøien, 2013), proves ultimately quite useful for understanding yoga as a phenomenological corporeal and heartfelt transformative, transcendental pursuit.

The Turners interpreted mysticism as an interior pilgrimage and pilgrimage as exteriorized mysticism. The ancient practise of yoga assumed a similar conception of yoga as being both an interior and exterior physical and embodied spiritual journey towards one's "highest intelligence"; the mystical experience. The practise of Ashtanga uses a language cleansed of religious association, and where there is no mention of the mystical per se in the teachings of Jois, anyone familiar with Ashtanga is likely familiar with Jois most popular reassurance: "Practice, practise, practise. Then all is coming!" Hassell-Newcombe's survey reveals that this promise of Jois' may not, after all, be empty; many serious practitioners find both meaning, and elements of the mystical experience in their yoga.

Ritual and rites of passage influenced heavily the Turners' study of pilgrimage and was applied by the anthropologists to their interpretation of the pilgrim's transitions; that formalised series of prescribed actions and behaviours with reference to "beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (p. 243), consisting of a system and its symbols and culminating in transformation while allowing people to adjust to internal transitions, as well as those external and environmental. The symbol as a small "unit" in that ritual system was deemed to influence the subject through its association with any number of actions, relationships, words or gestures; some symbols being more central or pivotal than others: both ideological and sensory (oretic). Sensorily perceptible outward forms of the symbol can arouse gross desires and feelings which are felt bodily and emotionally more than understood intellectually, representing what they refer to as "universal experience". The sensory experience of a signifier is deeply physiologically stimulating, with "links with the unconscious" (p.247). When these dominant, central symbols, which are experienced as embodying some unknown power from an unknown source, combine the sensory with the ideological in the ritual process, "norms become saturated with emotion, while gross and basic emotions become ennobled through social values" (p.247). These symbols, when experienced sensorily, have the power to inform, transform and enrich lives.

The Turners felt it crucial to make sense of the ritual as a powerful sensory experience, experienced bodily and emotionally in the unconscious. Marked by a separation from the everyday, an ambiguous suspension of past and future, and then a return to the mundane, pilgrimage was described as the ultimate optional transformative ritual. Primary accounts from yoga practitioners describe a like sensation of becoming detached, suspended, and embodied; the

practise of yoga through this lens of optational liminality and the orectic and deeply physiologically stimulating sensory experience of ritual may indeed lend an enlightening perspective to Ashtanga. If the ritual is important in pilgrimage, it is equally so in this yoga practise of Ashtanga. The process is largely the same from one daily practise to the next; there is a ritual sequence of events in a heterotropic environment creating a space of otherness, which becomes at the same time mental and physical, allowing for a detachment from one's everyday experience of time and place. To Durkheim's structural theories of integration and anti-anarchy, Ashtangis can be viewed as creating order through ritual, while also validating the Turner's theories of anti-structure. Ashtangis make a break with conventional hierarchical society when they release themselves into their practise, whether it be physically into the *sangha* (community) of other practitioners, the studio with other Ashtangis, or even philosophically in embracing associated values of equality and equanimity. Their ritual begins with a calming of nerves, a conscious slowing down and deepening of the breath, a letting go of outside stimulation and internal preoccupations of the mind. It is a ritual which acknowledges practises unfamiliar to most Westerners not familiar with a dedicated yoga practise, and for many this represents "engaging in an activity at odds with the consumerist bent of Western society", says Benjamin Richard Smith in his thesis on the body, mind, and spirit connection of the Ashtangi (2007). From the barefeet, the clothing, the mat, the chanting and Om and perhaps exotic incense or essential oils demarcating a separate space for practise, to the photographs of Jois in India and the Mysore palace which often hang from the walls of studios dedicated to the practise of Ashtanga, to the pervasive peace and quiet often cultivated, the Ashtangi experiences a break with his mundane quotidian.

The Turners explore the orectic aspect of the pilgrimage; their lens views the pilgrimage as embodied and intimately linked to the unconscious. Smith, in *Adjusting the quotidian: Ashtanga Yoga as everyday practise* (2004) discovered that "during moments when concerted awareness is brought to *asana* practise, calm and equanimity are maintained through challenge, and the patterns of the embodied Self become visible, that the spiritual aspect of yoga practise emphasised by practitioners also becomes evident" (p.7). The Turners explore varieties of physical motion that consummate the pilgrimage, during which the possibility of social and psychological transformation occurs through a series of transitions culminating in an encounter with the "Self". That lens, applied to Ashtanga, helps make sense of the series of transitions experienced through

the serious practise of yoga; the discipline and the ordeal during which social structure dissolves and one's nature has the potential to be discovered more consciously. They suggest that when both time and space dissolve, as they have the potential to do on pilgrimage, and during the strenuous practise of yoga *asana*, the numinous is experienced through symbols and myths. This aspect of the ritual is considered to be a transient nomadism, or movement in a dissolution of structure, or between structures, transiting the pilgrim into a new state of experience.

Communitas as a commonness of feeling where separate but similar individuals with similar emotional dispositions converge, serves extremely well to describe what takes place amongst those serious and regular practitioners in a studio/*shala* setting. Communitas amongst pilgrims, as the Turners defined it, is a "collective effervescence and interrelatedness where symbols become recharged" through the emotional and sensory (unconscious and conscious both) impact of rituals; it is a sharing between humans which comes about spontaneously through a like communion of experience, liberating individuals from conformity. First-hand accounts of Ashtangis, as we have explored, have described a very similar experience in practising alongside others.

Other themes the Turners isolate all serve to bring into focus the practise of Ashtanga. Space and withdrawal, in the pilgrimage, is important in that it marks a seclusion which the Turners claim evolved in the absence of other opportunities for Christian laity to experience liminality. The pilgrimage, a journey to a sacred place, secluded from the mundane, became a sacralized space at a distance from the milieu in which one's domestic life played out. And for those without the means to remove themselves physically, surrogate pilgrimages became an alternative. Individual growth, as opposed to status, allows for a more actualized Self and an experience of something meaningful. Fully-exposed sacra are available to anyone willing to undertake the pilgrimage, the secret sacra is what lies within. The themes of individual healing, of free will, distance from home and arduousness of journey undertaken, all round out their picture of pilgrimage, and through the same lens, help make sense of the practise of Ashtanga. If the pilgrim must travel far, the Ashtangi, when he is very serious, will travel to the seat of his practise far off also. When he arrives, his journey will be inward and near. If he cannot undertake the journey to Mysore, he will make the inward journey nonetheless and release himself from his domestic preoccupations for the time he is on his mat: sense withdrawal, concentration and meditation making up the largest part of his practise. In turning the focus inward, using the breath and the gaze to focus internally, the

Ashtangi is also able to, on a smaller scale, look beyond the entanglements of his responsibilities at home.

A practise of Ashtanga is a typically highly personal. It is for the benefit of the individual alone, rather than for the good of any larger social unit as a whole. It is always in the singular that one makes reference to one's practise, even amongst those with whom one practises alongside, with whom one may have indeed experienced the communal sensation of *communitas*. Each individual recognises his growth and development as highly personal and individual to him, and so the language the Ashtangi uses reflects his individualism. One may practise to heal oneself, spiritually or more often physically as a measure against inactivity and will rarely, contrary to the pilgrimage, undertake a practise for the exclusive benefit of another. It is, however, a common exercise to devote one's daily practise to another who might benefit. Most Ashtanga led classes include a moment of pensivity, in which one is encouraged to devote one's energies to a entity in need. There is certainly some crossover in the aspect of a journey undertaken with the intention of healing.

Free will, assumed as a basic human right in contemporary Western society, endows man and woman both with the empowerment to choose his own faith however he might prove inclined. As much as this provides the pilgrim with the liberty to pursue his own assumed *axis mundi*, the Ashtangi equally makes the most of his free will to pursue a path which speaks to him of transformation to one degree or another. Like the pilgrim, that which is far off beckons, for the Ashtangi and pilgrim both it may be interiorized or very much physical. The arduousness of the journey only amplifying the experience. We might be hard pressed, through this lens, to separate the pilgrim from the Ashtangi and vice versa.

Bounded field sites in anthropology in traditional fieldwork was broken apart with transnationalism; ways of knowing and viewing cultures was in flux, and in the 1980s' anthropologists began to deconstruct interpretive models with new topics and models multiplying. Those anthropologists contesting the Turners challenged their assumptions of the *axis mundi* and sacred site. The point of the contestation was that, that which renders a site holy is not necessarily "internally generated" and that shrines might conversely act as "empty vessels" mirroring back the

pilgrim's assumptions and respective discourses. Pilgrimage scholars challenged the necessary existence of the *axis mundi*, hierophanies, *communitas* and anti-structure.

In deconstructing the traditional structuralist and anti-structuralist discourse about pilgrimage, which share the same foundations, pilgrimage is opened up as a forum for competing discourses. The Turners pilgrimage is very much place centred sacredness; Sallnow and Eade (1991), in contesting this place-centred sacredness argue that place is but one modality of the localization of divine power in pilgrimage. Person centred sacredness, they suggest, might precede it empirically. This deconstructed lens assists us in making better sense of the spiritual aspect of the Ashtangi's practise. Because of the different layers that form the of the yogic pilgrimage, and the roots of yoga as a spiritual tradition which overlaps the outward with the inward, the inner with the outer, muddying the distinction between the both, this Western contestation theory which challenges the place centred paradigm becomes an additional angle from which to view the multidimensional practise of Ashtanga.

Ashtanga is a practise in which the sacred manifests itself in myriad ways.. Sallnow and Eade contest the Turnerian (Eliadian) *axis mundi* as being generated by the site itself, arguing the importance of a different method of analysis in pilgrimage studies: the sacred place is simply the medium of the sacred geography, or conceived of as such, because it is a physical locale that mediates the inherent holiness of a person. This lens of contestation reconsiders "person", "place" and "text" as being in unison in Christian pilgrimage: understanding place as an "empty vessel" reflecting back pilgrims diverse assumptions, to which pilgrims impose their own respective discourses, very much sheds light on the Ashtangi: his body, the place his practise originates, within and without, his mat, and the sanctuary in which he devotes himself to his practise [...] all of these elements intertwined in his personalised faith, that will serve his body and spirit.

Coleman & Eade in their study of contemporary pilgrimage, show that displacement is constitutive of, rather than incidental to cultural meaning. They compile vastly different reflections spanning the myriad different ways in which cultures in motion create meaningful experiences. This highly influential text explores the centrality of movement to the experience of the pilgrim: the difficulty in defining the notion of journey, and the issue of geography; if, as their contemporary anthropological studies suggest, pilgrimage is best interpreted within a more diverse understanding

of movement, the lens then becomes even more appropriate. They explore movement as central to pilgrimage, qualifying it as performative action which can effect (sometimes unconsciously) social and cultural transformations, as embodied action and corporeal testing, in pushing one's body physically to bring about transformative bodily experiences; as part of a semantic field rather than as a category looked at within the context of its social and cultural landscape, and finally as a metaphor. The lens could not be more appropriate in making sense of Ashtanga. Scholarly studies of Ashtanga, which we have explored, have shown movement as being central to the experience of Ashtangis, qualifying it similarly as a testing and pushing of limits to bring about change and development, and transformation: socially, culturally and spiritually, with movement as part of a semantic field within that landscape, and finally as a metaphor when viewed from a Western perspective which divides embodiment from physical journeying.

Mobility, for pilgrims and Ashtangis both, intersects with myriad cultural and religious contexts. The connecting theme in the contributions to their collection of studies on pilgrimage is the diversity in the process of sacralization of movement. Ashtangis, through this lens reinforce the editor's hypothesis and claim that journeying is all about journeys, transforming history into both myth and ritual in a profoundly personal and meaningful process. Ashtanga is an ongoing pilgrimage, a journey in which the ultimate end goal is never quite reached and continues to beckon.

## CONCLUSION

Through the lens of pilgrimage across the admittedly restricted range of sociological studies, psychological archotyping and anthropological research that this study would allow, Ashtanga yoga becomes a phenomenon in contemporary society which I have attempted to demonstrate as a pursuit most saliently understood through the lens of pilgrimage. I have endeavoured to test that hypothesis through the juxtaposition of theories and dialogue surrounding the pilgrim and the Ashtangi, and I am not disappointed to find that the exercise has been illuminating.

Through this lens, we, as Westerners, who behold a very different mindset than that which is Indian, where the body is the microcosm of the macrocosm, where polytheism is actually a monistic ontology, where the concepts of time and language, images and the realms of the physical world situate themselves as markedly disparate from Western conceptions, are invited to view the seemingly illogical Eastern correspondences as less unfamiliar, less disconnected than they might be without such a paradigm of reference. Ashtangis have claimed to be transformed through corporeal testing and this by all accounts is the route toward spiritual growth. The themes which surface through the analysis of the internal and external yogic pilgrimage from both a contemporary academic and historical perspective are dissected and mirrored when analysed through the lens of contemporary pilgrimage studies. The phenomenon of yoga and that of pilgrimage share similarities, which inform, illuminate, and give meaning to the symbiotic relationship which continues to draw modern seekers forward and beyond conventional boundaries of analysis and scholarship.

In the yogic pilgrimage, the body acts as a guide for the soul, in which heightened sensitivity and binary harmony becomes a very real possibility. The context of late modernity is one in which individuals are permitted, by themselves and by Western liberal society, to create their own path of meaning. There is an autonomy in creating one's own spiritual sanctuary, a place where there is room made for that alterity which informs our understanding of spirit. This individualised questing reinforces the initiatory agency, valued so much in contemporary society, of the Ashtangi as empowered with the ownership of his spiritual potential: that potential becomes the exclusive destination which he holds out as his end-goal. He moves within himself, into his inner realm, in a testing and transcending of physical boundaries.



This experience of the Ashtangi is then explained objectively from the perspective of theories of embodiment: the yoga body becomes the sacred vehicle and the site of religious expression and experience. The Ashtangi is the embodiment of his society's restless pursuit for meaning, his plasticity and receptiveness, his disenchantment with Western traditions. He wants something else other than religion, he wants something "more": he wants a lived experience. And if it all feels modern, the lens of pilgrimage confirms the timeless as well as the temporal elements of a tradition both of, and in motion.

The archetype of the pilgrim is one which is based on the precept that there exist universal symbols which transcend time; this is a symbol for change and transformation, for movement and exploration. It is a symbol which provokes action, movement through which one steers oneself in the direction of one's true inner Self, one's most authentic nature outside the bounds of one's socialization and social responsibilities. The archetypal pilgrim is a timeless representation of a timeless human psychic drive, to become what one is most fundamentally and at one's core.

Anthropology highlights the ritual as fundamental to the experience of transformation, and the lens of pilgrimage from the perspective of this discipline, as a ritual in which transformation is effected as a liminal experience, proves invaluable in giving shape to the rituals of Ashtanga. The theories of pilgrimage from this field of study draw attention to), broadly explored from many different angles, a kaleidoscopic viewing of an extremely varied constellation of themes. The pilgrimage has inspired a vast panorama of perspectives which, when used as a lens with yoga, presents a practice diverse in every aspect that motivates it and brings life to it through action.

The pilgrimage is a practice which, when used as a lens, affords an adaptation of Eastern theology to the conditioned Western mind. The pilgrimage makes sense of movement as a means of quieting the mind and discharging the energy from the psyche to make room for the spirit. It makes sense of a journey where, even through the noise of commerce, fashion, trends, marketing and the souvenirs, simulacra amid claims of authenticity and legitimacy, less traditional modes of movement and journeying, pain and suffering and surrender and ecstasy, seeing and chanting and praying and prostrating, the voyage through and toward sacred terrain is but a homecoming, where home is the Self and the roots of that Self that derive their life force from communion with Spirit.

Further potential exists in more extensive research on the phenomenon as an experiential, embodied and potentially mystical experience amongst those with a serious physical practise across a broader spectrum of modern postural yoga.

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