

STUDY GUIDE: MODULES 11 AND 12: MAJOR TEXTS

OUR MAJOR TEXTS~~INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

*A look at select early civilizations (in our case, Indian and Chinese), their histories, spiritual practices, religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism), and ancient texts brings the contemporary yoga student face to face with human psychology, philosophy, poetry, archetypes, mythology, other fictions, ancient communication and teaching techniques, muddled timelines, historians' guesswork, unlimited commentary by experts, endless arguments about which translations are the most accurate, much historically that is unknown, and, if that's not enough, the charge to discover what such ancient exigencies—civilizations, their stories, and their religions--have to do with current times, let alone yoga.

*Questions like 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I alive?' are questions about the **Ultimate Reality** of all things. Theological, philosophical, cosmological, and psychological realms are places where we seek to find answers to the questions of who we are, why we are, and what purpose we should serve while alive. Psychologist Carl Jung and mythologist Joseph Campbell sought to help us understand the journey we take towards self-discovery.

*The texts we have selected for this training are diverse and offer different messages and even methods for helping us find answers to our questions about the ultimate reality. From storytelling (*The Bhagavad Gita*) to tiny Haiku-like phrases (the sutras of Patanjali, the phrases of Lao-Tsu), these texts teach about yogic exercises, ideals, and way of life.

*Though the language is ancient, in all cases it is also translated. Combined, these factors might create the feeling of some disconnect between the 'writers'/transcribers of these ancient texts and us today. Still, little about our inquiry into knowing the Ultimate Reality has changed since these texts' messages were first created: humans still suffer, problems abound. These texts offer ancient messages that are still applicable today (or else we wouldn't still be studying them).

*But we all seek liberation, and we thus all want to know about those who achieve it. Thus, the journey of the hero is still universal. The hero leaves home, undergoes challenges, is reborn, and returns to lead others.

*During the course of the weekend, we will work to enhance our knowledge of our chosen major texts by viewing videos introducing us to the history of Indian civilization, Hinduism, Buddhism, *The Bhagavad Gita*; *The Yoga Sutra*, a compare/contrast study of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism; excerpts of the historic interviews between Bill Moyers and mythologist Joseph Campbell on the topics of the mind, the soul, myth, the hero, the journey, and storytelling; a look at not only *The Tao of Pooh* but statements from the *Tao Te Ching*; and view a documentary on the notion of the teacher/student or guru/student relationship.

*Finally, we will work to incorporate some of what we have learned into our teachings as trainees, no easy feat.

OUR MAJOR TEXTS~~INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS ABOUT THEM AND THEIR ASSOCIATED CIVILIZATIONS:

*Hinduism can be considered polytheistic.

*Hinduism and early texts that became Hindu's sacred texts (*Vedas, Upanishads*) are concerned with the order of the world and one's place in it. Everyone is on one's path in Samsara (reincarnation). Knowing one's place and performing one's work from one's place was crucial to karma.

*Buddhism is concerned with the notion of individual self-development, from which the order of the world unfold. It is argued by some to be more of a personal, psychological practice than a religion.

*Hinduism assimilated Buddhism into its teachings and developed worship for Buddha as a god. As Buddhism migrated north to China and then Japan, it taught that the Buddha was a leader rather than a godhead.

*Buddha knew of yoga. The limb of dhyana is one he cultivated do deeply it is a prominent feature in Buddhism.

*The eightfold path in Buddhism is similar to the eight limbs of yoga (created by Patanjali).

**The Vedas* (of the Aryan population), written in Vedic Sanskrit (one of the earliest Indo-European languages), are many, poetic, and rich with myth. They also instruct on man's necessary ongoing connection to the light/gods/entities that keep the universe going. Connection in Vedic times, according to the Vedas, is maintained through ritual and yoga.

*The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are stories scribed near the beginning of Christianity. They are epics: stories that are told, sung, danced, and acted by traveling troupes.

*The most famous of the M and R stories is *The Gita*. It has in common with Buddhism the new sense of a middle path, which neither renounces nor grasps at life. This is different from the ritualistic, sacrificing instruction of the Vedas, which purports one needs to stay in close connection to universal sources and gods.

*The sutras lack imagery and poeticism and storytelling, unlike the Vedas and Upanishads and *The Gita*. The sutras are thus sometimes viewed more as a manual for yoga instruction. The Vedas, Upanishads, and *The Gita* originated as hymnoids in the prehistoric era before committed to text.

*Evidence of India/United States spiritual connectivity is found in Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau's writings, who commented about *The Gita* and referenced the *Vedas*.

**The Tao Te Ching* touts naturalism. It is ahistorical (mentions no leaders of its time, for example), which is part of its popularity. Because it touts the values of nature and also exercise (from whence we get T'ai Chi), it is popular gained in popularity in the 1960s with the 20th Century free spirit movement.

*Confucianism influenced Lao-Tzu as some believe that the *Tao Te Ching* is an argument against Confucius's teachings. Buddhism has certainly influenced Taoism, though whether it influenced Lao-Tzu when he wrote it is up for debate. Still, Lao-Tzu's philosophy can draw parallels with Buddhism, particularly the simple life and enlightenment. It is also disputed where Lao-Tzu was a real or mythical writer or a group of writers functioning under a pseudonym.