

Yoga and the States of Consciousness. A Perspective of M. Eliade on the Yoga Phenomenon

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Abstract: *In this paper we seek to emphasize the relevance of Eliade's research beyond time, to see why meditation would be useful for the mind of the contemporary man in search of inner balance. Thus, we will analyze the Hindu metaphysical concepts and principles on which Yoga was developed, the distinctions between Yoga-sutra, as a central theoretical and practical current, and secondary typologies, and how the reader can position himself to make progress in probing yogic reality or fact anchored in the dynamics of the unconscious, from the perspective of Mircea Eliade and some researchers passionate about this field.*

Keywords: *Yoga; Hinduism; Brahma; Vedas; liberation; the desire-suffering circularity; anxiety; depression; mental health.*

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1. Introduction

The human being has always been looking for well-being from multiple perspectives and has sought to avoid discomfort. Starting from the search for the satisfaction of basic needs to the fact of looking for higher ones, he has been eager to increase his quality of life on various levels, on a physical, cognitive, mental, spiritual level. Depending on the historical period, context, culture, man has prioritized either the balance and the collective well-being, or the individual one, or both of them (interconnected). The perception of the reality and, therefore, of the notion of good can undergo distortions also on the background of the reference to figures considered emblematic for the subject in question, but contrasting with the collective referential (majority group). The contemporary society, marked by multiple crises, felt both collectively and personally, offers the individual challenges that are often difficult to manage in terms of mental health. The health pandemic can lead to an anxiety pandemic. Anxiety can easily appear on the background of isolation, deprivation of social interaction with peers regardless of the age of the subject or his/her socio-professional status. Based on this background, social responsibility (e.g. from the perspective of public health) is an assumed and internalized value for some, for others a desideratum, and for another part of the population it is a burden, or an impersonal notion that they remember and appeal exclusively when it comes to meeting their own needs. Although the human being is supposed to adapt easily (gradually) to environmental changes, economic and social conditions, etc., he does not adapt as easily to situations that the mind cannot understand in terms of predictability, expectations, and logic from the perspective of one's own cultural information and the way in which reason processes newly provided information. Fear, which is extremely natural in the case of any unique situation that man has never faced and has not developed resilience, is what makes the individual often react unpredictably. Thus, the tension accumulated due to frustration and stress in the face of unknown situations is discharged in the form of various forms of revolt, indignation, aggression directed against oneself or others.

Stress, insomnia, panic attacks, depression, anxiety, heart problems, are more and more common both in times of crisis (such as the pandemic) and especially in the aftermath of these ones and they disrupt the mental balance with which the individual was familiar. Alternative therapies have gained ground when people have either lost hope or confidence in authority, in science, or are trying to combine them in order to improve their well-

being. Today, for example, meditation is seen by some as a fashion and can be misperceived, just as prayer can be misinterpreted (Breaz, 2020; Ciubotaru, 2020; Lacatus, 2020; Mitrea, 2021). Science and faith can be assumed in a balanced way (can go hand in hand) by / for a religious person, just as science and meditation can bring a superior state of comfort to others. The problem arises when one relies exclusively on the mystical factor, on miracles and ignores the achievements of the human mind in terms of evolution and scientific discoveries.

Some researchers believe, for example, that yoga practices can reach deep layers of the mind and consciousness if approached consistently and scientifically, that it would help control high blood pressure and improve symptoms of depression and anxiety in people with poststroke disability or the effectiveness of yoga in modifying risk factors for cardiovascular disease and metabolic syndrome (Cave, 1993; Chan et al., 2012; Chu et al., 2016; Lawrence et al., 2013; Lawrence et al., 2017; Thayabaranathan et al., 2017; Thayabaranathan et al., 2022), adjusting prenatal depression (Gong et al., 2015) as well as depression and anxiety of women (Javnbakht et al., 2009) or the frequency of asthma attacks (Freitas et al., 2013), could improve lipid control, improve lung function, could prevent anxiety and depression among hemodialysis patients (Tayyebi et al., 2011) adjusting for chronic pain, etc.; "There is also promising evidence for the use of yoga and meditation for mental health issues such as stress management, non-psychotic mood, high trait anxiety and generalized anxiety disorders and mild to moderate depression, usually as part of a multi disciplinary approach" (Penman et al., 2012). "Yoga has an effective role in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression that can be considered as complementary medicine and reduce the medical cost per treatment by reducing the use of drugs. Taking these aspects into account, the reason behind the effect of yoga on stress, anxiety, and depression is not clear for us and may be transient, and it is suggested that future studies are done to investigate the long-term effect of yoga on stress, anxiety, and depression" "[...] despite the popularity and the positive psychological and physiological effects of yoga, it is not widely studied to find to what extent it really prevents and treats mental disorders" (Shohani et al., 2018).

Seeing the increased interest that people manifest during this period for the works and courses of mindfulness, etc., with some of them relying on neuroscience research (Thayabaranathan et al., 2018) that promotes meditation as a life way in order to achieve the inner balance, we tried to underline some ideas about the yoga phenomenon.

Since it is such a vast field, we chose to pinpoint Mircea Eliade's perspective on what Yoga is, namely the way in which meditation affects direct knowledge and the relationship between meditation and knowledge, as proposed for interpretation by this thinker. We appeal to the interpretation of M. Eliade especially since we (the authors) do not have the quality to make valuable judgments about yoga and yoga practices because we are neither practitioners nor knowledgeable experts in this area of research, but only indirect observers.

2. Eliade and tackling the Yoga phenomenon within the hermeneutics of religions.

Currently, one cannot refer to the hermeneutics and history of religions without evoking the name and work of Mircea Eliade. The Romanian scholar illustrated the course of the concerns related to the analysis of the religious phenomenon on the scale of the entire international scientific environment. The way in which the information was doubled by the capacity of interpretive sounding, determined, in his writings, the clear outline for the reading public of the phenomenon of understanding and clarification, of fluent, constant and open deepening of the related religious realities (Afloroaei, 2018). To Eliade, it is important that the reader's effort be focused on the interpretive area, often inviting him to individual questions and assumptions. Thus, the phenomenon of religious experience, regardless of the sacramental scenario in which it slipped, proves to be indeterminate and always subject to new approaches. From the initiation myths to the events of the primary revelation that laid the foundation of great religions, from the experience of the timeless sacred in the forms of tribal primitivism to the projection to transcendence through the chosen ones, a projection that is liturgically organized in the great religions, Eliade tried to describe these processes, that are pivotal for the destiny of mankind, inviting the reader to an initiatory journey through a dimension in which the unknown proves much broader than the strictly rational and cognitively quantifiable evidence. The Yoga phenomenon fits into this vast universe approached by Eliade from a position of historian but also of a hermeneutic, from the perspective of a theorist but also of a faithful practitioner.

2.1. Principles of the Yoga existential metaphysics.

Eliade positioned the idea of the way of thinking and practicing the principles of Yoga in the broad framework of Indian spirituality. Thus, it is necessary, first of all, to mention the four primordial concepts around which the Indian religious and philosophical consciousness revolves. They are

karman, *māyā*, *nirvāṇa* and *Yoga* (Eliade, 1993). The four concepts correspond to four principles of philosophical search, of metaphysical investigation. Thus, the first one aims at understanding the law of universal causality at the level of human actions and options. Every soul has a *karma*, that is, an accumulation of information that can be negative or positive, in relation to how it has acted, thought and felt, in relation to the choice of good or evil. Practically, causality expresses the implacable correlation between personal choices and the consequences of these choices, consequences that accumulate, like a hostile or beneficial environment on that particular consciousness, generating, at specific moments, inevitable concretisations. Therefore, no conscience can avoid the aftermath of its own choices and actions, if they have been bad, unless it manifests a total desire to reduce the karmic negative sediments (Eliade, 1993). The second principle belongs to the concept of *māyā* and is closely related to that of *avidya*. The term *māyā* means cosmic illusion and the term “*avidya*” refers to ignorance. As long as man performs negative deeds based on wrong thoughts, feelings, and choices, he will accumulate a dark karma that will keep him anchored in the low realms of materiality and ephemeral voluptuousness, that is, it will keep his conscience captive in the great illusion that is designated by the term “*māyā*”. Lost in the immensity of this universal hypnosis, the consciousness loaded with a strongly negative karma will be permanently infused by a state of ignorance. A vicious circle of karma self-empowerment encompasses the consciousness that, without realizing it, slides into basal, telluric levels, farther from the supreme truth, from the light of Brahma, from *nirvāṇa*. This is, in fact, the third key concept for the Indian thought, perceived by Eliade, as the generating factor of the principle that there is a supreme or absolute Reality, a pure Being, situated beyond the complexity of the ontological and gnoseological illusion generated by *māyā*. Transcendent, indeterminate, unconditional, immortal, this reality is the one towards which the individual consciousness, *Brahma Atman*, must aim, its ultimate goal being its reintegration into the great universal consciousness, *Brahama Brahma*. Man must, therefore, free himself from restraint in the mobility of the *maya*, but also from the pressure of negative karma. The redemption or liberation from the existential incidence of these annihilating factors of the Brahmanical light from consciousness can be accomplished only through discipline and the sacrifice of the act of meditation. Then comes into play the fourth key concept for Indian spirituality, namely the concept of Yoga. The principle that this concept generates and supports is that which indicates the possibility of liberation from *māyā* and under the pressure of karma through techniques of concentration and asceticism that must be practiced in a

disciplined and constant manner, techniques called mosksa or mutti. There is, therefore, according to this principle, the possibility of redemption and transcendence towards the absolute Being, but in order for it to become achievable for an individual consciousness it must assume the act of practicing Yoga indefinitely. Therefore, it is a question of a total, general attitude towards life, a certain way of life that does not allow the return to an existence dedicated to matter and perennial pleasures. Yoga would therefore designate the sum of these means, techniques, acts that are assumed by the one who chooses the ascetic path of liberation as the only path of his new life, life that has moved its centre of gravity from the sphere of the immanent to that of transcendence, that must be acquired through constant, unremitting effort (Eliade, 1993).

Eliade insisted, starting from these four principles of Indian spirituality, that for the sage of Vedas and Yoga practices, the concept of truth has primarily no gnoseological value, as is the case with Western thought. It has soteriological value. "In India, metaphysical knowledge always has a soteriological purpose. Therefore, only metaphysical knowledge (vidyā, jñāna, prajñā) is appreciated and sought, so the knowledge of the ultimate realities" (Eliade, 1992a; Eliade, 1993). Thus, the rational knowledge in itself, which can be exposed and framed in the registers of logical arguments, is less important than the act of liberation itself, of deliverance from the captivity of karma and the chains of consciousness in the relative structures of Maya. Eliade emphasized that for the Indian sage, it is not the acquisition and control of truth that matters, as in the case of the Western philosopher, but the act of liberating the conscience by subjecting it to the truth, by controlling it by the truth. This implies a transfiguration, a mutation at the level of the whole individual life, an assumption of an initiatory death in terms of the correlations with the immanent and the spatio-temporal, a clear division in relation to the ephemerality and a rebirth to an unconditional way of existence, in which the symbiosis between individual and universal Brahma is lived to the fullest (Eliade, 1992b). "Through 'knowledge' man 'awakens', freeing himself from the illusions of the world of phenomena. "By knowledge" means: by the practice of retreat - which will have the effect of making him find his own center, to coincide with "his true spirit" (puruṣa, atman). Knowledge is thus transformed into meditation, and metaphysics becomes soterology" (Eliade, 1992a).

3. Classical Yoga and secondary typologies. Meaning and terminology.

The word *Yoga* is derived from the term *yuj* which means to hold together, to gather, to put in the yoke. From this term is also derived the Latin verb *jungere, jungum* and from it, the English verb *yoke* (Eliade, 1993). Therefore, it seems that the original terminology from which the word *Yoga* derived was to describe a state of discipline, and control of our psyche and body (Eliade, 1992a). Yoga also means "either a mystical union of the soul with the divine, or a restoration of the ultimate, autonomous self-consciousness, unaltered by the mental experience" (Eliade, 1992b).

„Yoga is an ancient Eastern philosophy of living that includes techniques such as physical postures (*asana*), breathing practices (*pranayama*), meditation and relaxation, moral codes and other practices. Together, these practices are said to provide a path to self-realization, or union between the individual and the universal consciousness. In Western society, aspects of yoga are commonly practiced for exercise, relaxation or for their therapeutic potential” (Penman et al., 2012).

This placement under “obedience” (and listening to the inner self) can be achieved through asceticism and meditation techniques. Basically, the instability of thoughts and emotions is brought under control only through exercise and perseverance of self-control. This effort cannot be fulfilled suddenly, it must be staged, developed progressively and this dosage of self-control required discipline and the organization and dosing of one’s own psychic energy resources (Sandu, 2008; 2021).

Eliade pointed out that the basic elements of Yoga meditation techniques as well as the fundamental components of Yoga philosophy are concentrated in what is called *Classical Yoga*, a system proposed by *Pantajali* in his work *Yoga-Sūtra*. The complexity of the Yoga phenomenon has inevitably led to the formation of secondary levels of theoretical and practical development, so that various schools and directions have emerged. They became popular among Yoga followers who have not taken a systematic approach to the concept and have emphasized only on the constant practice of meditation and meditation exercises (Eliade, 1992a).

Some of these directions have adopted elements of mysticism or magic. To Eliade, this is justifiable because of the central metaphysical vein of Yoga. In essence, as the Romanian scientist points out, a consciousness cannot gain control over its own instinctual impulses and disturbances, as well as over the destabilizing influences of the mechanics of body biology unless it first forces itself to give up its projection and anchor in the immanent dimension of space and time. The act of renouncing and

withdrawing consciousness from the constant relations to the imperatives of ephemeral existence presupposes the self-sacrificing capacity that imposes its distancing and resurrection from its own spiritual evolution. This gesture of resurrection in the sense of initiatory rebirth amid self-sacrifice justifies major compatibilities between the experience of Yoga practices and the mystical experience. If Yoga signifies the initial act of tying and bringing together thoughts and emotions from their chaotic scattering, then this approach can only be achieved through the prior act of withdrawal from the disturbing dynamics of urban existence. Only through the act of withdrawal and rejection in the face of everyday “normality”, through the act of emancipation from the world, as Eliade calls it, can the foundations for self-control be stabilized. Therefore, before seeking divine support, classical Yoga mentions the adherence to the belief in Divinity, (Deussen, 1992) unlike other secondary developments of the atheist Yoga doctrine, the one who desires to become an ascetic must assume the exercise of self-control based on the radicalism of a detachment from the profane world. The effort of the autonomous man, the self-discipline and the concentration of thoughts and emotions can be the intermediate stage between the separation from the sphere of the profane space and time and the integration in the absolute universal consciousness. The similarity with the philosophical and mystical vision of Tantrism or with the metaphysical and symbolic openings of alchemy is revealed, according to Eliade, in the assumption by classical Yoga of the idea of spiritual initiation and guidance. Thus, for the beginner, the most appropriate status is that of apprentice, disciple of a master, called guru. Thus, the path of the evolution of consciousness from the profane phase to the sacredness of full self-control must be carefully observed and corrected by a spiritual master, a teacher who must be obeyed by the disciple. The very state of obedience is a decisive step in this evolutionary process. The similarities with the spiritual path proposed by other schools and religious traditions are obvious. The archaic symbolism of initiation makes its presence felt especially by the yogin’s assumption of the acquisition of a *new mystical body*, a formula also found in alchemical thinking. In fact, the phenomenon of spiritual rebirth is targeted in this context, the yogin being the one who is born twice, according to the Brahmanical expressions and the Vedic tradition from which the Yoga school derives. As soon as he gets this new spiritual attire, this new complex of physical and mental attitude, the yogin can access transcendence through the constant exercise of control and meditation. The philosophy of Yoga is known from the beginning in the Indian tradition as *Yoga-darsana*, the term *darsana* meaning vision, sight but also point of approach, perspective. At the etymological basis of this term

one can identify the lexical particle *drs* which designates the idea of vision. The fact that the centre of gravity of this concept and, implicitly of the philosophy of Yoga, is the act of vision, of revealing the truth, of understanding the access to transcendence, does not imply, as Eliade claims, a possible definition of this type of philosophy as a totally mystical one. On the contrary, the logical argumentation, the analytical discourse are present and are permanently included in the act of initiation, but the approach of revelation or, more precisely, of enlightenment occupies a central place. Without this essential moment, the whole argumentative and logical architecture proves to be similar to the sophisticated efforts of the ancient Greeks. The concept of enlightenment pervades, like a central axis, the whole philosophy of Yoga, a philosophy exposed in the form of a system in Yoga-Sūtra proposed by Pantajali. (Eliade & Culianu, 1993) Within this system, he manages to condense ascetic practices, meditation techniques, self-control formulas, and expose them in an organized way. But, as he himself admits, all this information is not the result of his own study, but the product of a long time in which Indian spirituality developed an impressive number of ascetic practices. These efforts found their organized expression in Pantajali's work, which is a collection of the most representative meditation and control techniques practiced in Yoga. The presentation of this information was doubled by a reconsideration of the key concepts of the *Samkhya* philosophy, a philosophy that is considered the conceptual framework for classical Yoga. Pantajali's intervention in this philosophy consists mainly in the introduction of the obvious theism, the metaphysics of Samkhya not being until then prone to recognizing and postulating the existence of a proper Divinity. Within the philosophy of Yoga is, therefore, introduced as the ultimate landmark of meditation efforts, the closeness of the ascetic consciousness to the absolute divine consciousness, namely *Isvara*. The principle of the symbiosis between individual Brahma and universal Brahma, between Brahma Atman and Brahma Brahma acquires, for the first time in Indian spirituality, a clear relation to the existence and grace of a supreme deity (Eliade, 1993).

Yoga has been regarded by the Brahmanical tradition as one of the six orthodox philosophical doctrines, that is, accepted as representative of the Brahmanical spirit. Unlike Buddhism or Jainism, it never faced the charge of heresy. Classical Yoga or Yoga-sūtra, systematized by Patañjali, has been recognized as the most representative school for the whole movement. The other secondary directions, less officially assumed, belonging to the popular meditation practices were later integrated, undergoing various modifications and adaptations. Yoga formulated by Patañjali's conceptual

organization has become the best known in Western culture, being accepted as the most representative formula for the entire yoga school of India. From the point of view of conceptual systematization, Yoga-sūtra developed by Patañjali, consists of four central chapters, four pillars containing decisive theoretical and technical landmarks. Thus, the first chapter or the first book contains 51 aphorisms or sutras and refers to the ability to achieve yogic ecstasy, the second book consists of 55 aphorisms and is called the chapter on accomplishment, the third book, also consisting of 55 aphorisms, deals with the problem of miraculous powers, the capacity and efforts devoted to their acquisition and chapter four focuses on the discussion on the approach of isolating the ascetic and includes 34 aphorisms. The whole work is a systematized compilation of ancient techniques and teachings, with the author restraining himself from bringing major changes to its content. Moreover, it is part of the tradition of authors who proposed texts dedicated to Brahmanical philosophies, a tradition that involved taking the data already present in the Vedic traditions and organizing them, systematizing the metaphysical and empirical content to clarify and improve the impact on new disciples and their possibility of didactic-informational assimilation (Eliade, 1992a). To Eliade, Yoga and the philosophy that has constantly revolved around its primordial concepts and techniques cannot be understood if their analysis is reduced to historical expressions, to the moments of appearance and development of this spiritual phenomenon or only to the investigation of its fundamental texts. Only the appeal to hermeneutic research, research requested and applied by Eliade for the whole range of religious manifestations of mankind, can open to the metaphysical foundations of the theoretical and practical complex represented by the Yoga movement. In this sense, Yoga must be seen as a *fact* and the dimension of yogic indulgence as a *reality*. But to Eliade, the notions of *fact* and *reality* have other valences, in the dimension of spiritual living and experiences, than those manifested in the framework of the profane world. They show a continuity that is slipped into a common framework that seems untouched by temporary developments. This explains the substantiality of the Yoga phenomenon with the whole Vedic tradition that is lost in an extremely distant past. In support of this finding, Paul Deussen, a leading name for Orientalist research, points to the eight decisive articles for the entire yogic philosophical system, pointing out that the last five of these articles are already present in several Upanisadic passages, much older than the attestation of Yoga practice. The eight articles, called *anga*, are listed as follows: *yama* or the principle of discipline in behaviour, *niyama* or self-discipline through asceticism, purification of bodily impulses at the

mental level, *asanam* or sitting, body position discipline, *pranayama* or breath control, *pratyahara* or withdrawal of sense organs, *dharana* or fixation of attention, *dhyana* or meditation and *samadhi*, full absorption of thought in the dimension of meditation (Deussen, 2007). The belonging of more than half of this code of the yogin to a much older tradition, the Vedic and Upanishad one, comes to confirm, therefore, not only the belonging of Yoga to a much larger and more distant historical spiritual block but also the assumption of these practices as techniques that were related to what Eliade called the experience of the sacred.

4. Peculiarities of the interpretive approach of Yoga theory and practices.

The historical and religious interpretation and the hermeneutic discussion are the methods by which, according to Eliade, a fact and a spiritual reality can be accessed in their deep meanings. The fact can be, according to the hermeneutic of religions, any experience of the sacred and any subsequent form of its interpretation. Whether we refer to a concrete historical moment, to the interval of a revelation or to the proposal of a text postulated as sacred, all these occurrences are, ultimately, epiphanic expressions, interventions of the sacred in the profane, projections of unconscious collective or individual mobility, towards the spatial and temporal continuum. These facts, in the sense given by Eliade to this term, constitute the essential content for the historical and religious interpretation which is able to capture multiple correlations and interferences between their manifestations, the substantial relations that make them components of a common religious background, regardless of different historical and geographical affiliation. By addressing this universal framework, this theme of the many religious deeds of mankind, the hermeneutic can have access not only to a superior understanding of their phenomenal structure but also to the foundations of evolution, development, survival or degeneration of the message they originally proposed and postulated to the whole mankind. At the same time, in order to grasp and interpret in depth the facts and the religious reality behind and underlying them, a constant *philosophical discussion* is required, as Eliade calls it, a discussion that proposes a hermeneutic analysis of concepts, terms at stake in a initial religious experience as well as the manifestation of this frontier experience. The philosophical discussion is also the method by which unilateralism in the interpretation of a religious phenomenon can be avoided. Yoga has such a peculiarity, it is spread in many directions, schools, conceptualizations and applications that the hermeneutic should not be limited to classical Yoga described by Patañjali.

(Eliade, 1992a) Another danger that can block a proper interpretation of the spiritual facts related to the discipline of Yoga is the informational and unconscious baggage of the Western hermeneutics. He can inaugurate his interpretive approach being dominated by the landmarks and reflections of the culture from which he comes as well as by the religious perspectives, the mentality and the vision of the western spirituality. This preliminary framework can lead to a misinterpretation of the substance of the phenomenon under scrutiny. For this reason, the need for philosophical discussion, for hermeneutical issues that give way to other perspectives and data than those that are part of the initial training of the researcher, is all the more evident. Eliade argued that for the hermeneutic approach to the Yoga phenomenon a detachment from Western tradition and knowledge had to be made, requiring the effort of a psychological permutation, a transposition into the spiritual position of the yogin, perhaps not coincidentally Eliade himself being not only a hermeneut, but also a practitioner of Yoga techniques. The temperamental typology of the interpreter plays an important role in directing the hermeneutic discourse at the level of the Yoga phenomenon. Thus, an *extrospective* interpreter could insist on the concrete, historical data of the evolution of Yoga schools, on the information dating the life of the great masters and disciples, on the appearance and development of specific terminologies and techniques, on ascetic radicalism, on chronologies and divisions of secondary schools that revolved around the central direction represented by classical Yoga, on the survival of primitive religious themes and the ways of taking over and adapting external mystical influences. Instead, an *introspective* interpreter would seek to avoid processing such a multitude of data and will focus his analysis on the actual experience of Yoga, on the mental state and the evolution of the contemplator's capacity for meditation and practice, on his vision of the way in which emotions can be controlled with the dynamics of thoughts, the corporality becoming an instrument in the evolutionary process of self-control and spiritual leap into the supreme state of *Nirvana*. In Eliade's opinion, both approaches, both specific to the extrospective interpreter and those belonging to the introspective analyst, must be taken as ways of understanding and deepening the phenomenon of Yoga. If we only accept the effort of the extrospective interpreter, then the result will be a series of data, historical information and statistics that will give us an overview of the historical phenomenon that was and is Yoga. If, instead, we only accept the contribution of the introspective hermeneutic, then we will witness the proposal of a strictly theosophical vision, an argumentative system that will describe the Yoga phenomenon detached from the context

of universal culture and the global religious experience of mankind. In Eliade's opinion, both approaches balance and complement each other, the symbiosis between them leading to a more comprehensive picture meant to provide a real perspective on both the spiritual *fact* of Yoga and the experience by its followers of the related religious *reality*. Eliade compared the difference between extrospective and introspective hermeneutics with the distinction between geometry and algebra. In the first one, the analysis of form predominates, in the second one the research of content. The two must balance each other and work together for the evolution of the investigation as a whole towards the proposed common goal. In fact, as Eliade points out, the distinction between extrospective and introspective is a general human psychological characteristic, the two typologies balancing and compensating each other. Pantajali himself, as the one who systematized the conceptualism of classical Yoga, tried a symbiosis between the extrospective and the introspective approach of the traditional Yoga texts. Thus, on the one hand he succeeded in constructing a clear image of the place and purpose of this discipline in the landscape of Brahmanical spirituality, on the other hand he described the internal functionalities of the yogic emotional and mental experience.

From the perspective of the hermeneutics of the religions developed by Eliade, any religious approach, regardless of its belonging to a certain ritual system, is based on the motivation to take the individual consciousness back to the level of universal consciousness. This resettlement or reordering constitutes a recovery of a major loss from an ancestral time, a cancellation of a major deficiency that determined the anchoring of the human being in the circularity of the mutual emphasizing between suffering and desire. The religious unrest, the turmoil, and the ritualistic tensions embodied in self-sacrifice, penitence, and the imposition of radical restrictions on primordial instincts essentially aim at the phenomenality of detachment or fall from the initial harmony and the decisive attempt to recover this inaugural collapse for the temporal life, subject to intense desire and suffering. Eliade mentioned here the term *malaise* as the concept that describes the state of nostalgia for an area of the super-temporal where individual consciousness was integrated into the harmonious totality of cosmic energy. In essence, all the great religions slip their essential messages into the area of the promise of a rediscovery of the initial happiness, an Edenic state situated outside the insoluble evolutions of time. The assumption and practice of the religious ritual indisputably involves a social side, ensuring the stability of norms and the preservation of the human community. In the absence of these ethical imperatives, the instinctual nature would gain devastating proportions from

the outpouring of its destructive impulses and the human being would experience a rapid process of self-destruction. The containment, the control, the putting under the restriction of the ethical-religious imperatives have managed, for millennia, to allow the progressive dynamics of the human society. But this goal is secondary or, more precisely, it is related to the surface components of the religious phenomenon. Its central target has nothing to do with the urban and social dimension of human life, with the spatio-temporal modalities of the human being. On the contrary, it does not involve the relations to the sphere of the ephemeral, of historical relativity, but the permanent correlation with the dimension of eternity, of the absolute supra-temporal harmony from which the individual consciousness has detached itself and into which it must return. The whole complexity of spatio-temporal life is seen, in this context, as a plan of the decline of consciousness similar to the Platonic cave, a stage of existential and gnoseological rupture between Brahma Brahma, the universal energy of the Creator and Brahma Atman, the individuality of the human soul (Eliade, 1992b). The possibility of dissociation, of disagreement, as Eliade calls it, is, in essence, what the religious language calls sin. Through the act of meditation, asceticism, and the imposition of control over instinctual telluric impulses, which are expressed in the body, the yogin can attain the state of spatial and temporal suspension of consciousness and thus position himself above sin in the sense of liberation from empirical needs dictated by materiality. It is the first step in the ascent to integration into the harmony of Brahma. Indian metaphysics uses the term *vidya* or *jnana* to describe this leap of consciousness, which means the process of matching the individual yogic intellect with the supreme intellect of Brahma. Sin, in this sense of the term, designates the opposite process, the removal, the constant distancing, the alienation of the individual consciousness in relation to the supreme or absolute one. In geometric proportions, the greater this distance, the more pronounced sin becomes, and the human spirit encapsulates itself more deeply in the coarseness and pressure of matter. The comparison with the light-dark dialectic is often used in the Brahmanical tradition so that, this mechanism of distance or approach to the absolute consciousness of the Creator is compared to the act of enlightenment when getting close to a powerful source of light, such as the sun, and to the phenomenon of darkness when persevering away from it. The one who attains perfection in meditation, asceticism, and control becomes enlightened, that is, a consciousness that reflects the Brahmanical light being very close to it or even assimilated by its high energies. In the Indian tradition, the term *Yoga* comes to mean a mystical practice that aims at the harmonization between

Purusha and *Ishvara*, between the individual soul and the universal divine soul (Eliade, 1992b). Matter and corporality are seen, in this context, as disturbing, destabilizing factors that prevent the construction of harmonization, of the perfect symbiosis between the two forms of energy. The problem of skepticism in the whole Vedic tradition is also seen in the dimension of yogic experience as a defining one, as Eliade warns. Thus, even if the level of union between the individual and the universal consciousness is reached, it can be easily lost. The karmic principle remains active and any residue or trace of imperfection, of spiritual impurity can determine the declassification of the personal consciousness from the threshold of the fusion with Brahma and the repositioning in the temporality of the cyclicity of suffering-desire. For the Eastern ascetic as well as for the Christian mystic, the world is a valley of lamentation, but moreover, even Eden cannot be acquired irreversibly, the karmic principle being activated even in the supra-temporal conditions offered by the image of Brahmanical heaven. Thus, some schools of Vedic thought have argued that the Edenic state is a transitory level for the individual consciousness which, in spite of moral excellence, the spiritual purity that can attain it, must submit to the karmic law of reincarnation and return to the realms of temporality and ephemeral materiality (Eliade, 1992b). Yoga was intended to be a complex of practices and techniques capable of leading the initiate to the state of suspension of karmic imperatives, to the level of total liberation called *mukti*. In fact, as Eliade notes, the issue of liberating individual consciousness to an eternal universal spiritual background, to an absolute divine consciousness, or to a framework that is not subject to spatio-temporal change was a central theme of the first metaphysical reflections present in the early writings of the *Upanishads*, as a philosophical direction within the vast universe of Vedic texts. Mythological characters, whether civilizing heroes or reforming kings, have constantly taken on metaphysical boundary questions, questions of human destiny, and the possibilities of liberation from the spectre of the ephemeral to a perfect universe, often considered a dimension of the Creator, a the primary source to which the individual spirit must return. This question was already understood in the early Vedic tradition and in the assertions of the *Upanishads* as the capital element for the whole destiny of the individual consciousness, the central factor of human existence. The sacrament, the ritual, the meditation cannot be conceived as simple exercises of the capacities of the spirit of self-affirmation, as control techniques meant to ensure a passage through life free from the problems of physical and mental affections. It could not be just a matter of mental and physical health. It was about the ancestral theme of salvation, of liberation from the dual

circularity of desires and sufferings that define the entire space-time existence. Overcoming the ephemerality could only be achieved, from the Vedic and, implicitly, yogic perspective, through a radical gesture of *elevation* and *fixation*, as Eliade calls it, an approach to refocus the attention of the spirit from the horizontal projection, at the level of the immanent frames, on a vertical projection only aimed at the transcendence and assimilation into the universality of Brahma's absolute consciousness (Eliade, 1992b). The problem of sacrifice, in this context, acquires an essential permutation. Thus, from the symbolic stage of the ritual of offering sacrifices and burning on the altars of the assumed deities, is made the transfer to the expression of self-sacrifice that is limited to the suspension of breathing, of the instinct of preservation through food and bodily protection. Physiological functions are seen as bearings through which excessive communication with the immanent is achieved and through which matter is kept in captivity. Therefore, the intensive reduction of their activity, the detachment of the attention of the consciousness from their demanding mobilities is imposed as an extremely important task for the yogin. We are witnessing the constant recommendation to perform a mental sacrifice, called by Eliade *ritual internalization*. Although, apparently, the request for a suspension or minimization of physiological activities seems to be fully suggested, in fact, what is intended is their integration into the universal cosmic rhythm, their harmonization with the whole existence and the energy of Brahma. It is more about adjusting any extensions and excesses, any focusing of mental attention on bodily needs and less about canceling or excluding them, which would get the fact of practicing Yoga close to destruction and suicidal tendencies (Eliade, 2000). What is ultimately pursued is not the forced acquisition of a state of holiness or full intelligence, but access to a supreme state of consciousness that does not exclude but encompasses the sphere of corporeality. (Chatterjee, 1988). This perspective of integrating the whole psycho-physical complex into the super-temporal order of Brahma finds its apogee, thanks to the contribution of the philosophy of Yoga, in the theological system offered by tantrism, which confirms, once again, the spiritual unity underlying the religious experience of India. Through constant contemplation and asceticism, the attention of consciousness can, therefore, be detached from the labyrinth of temporal life and reconnected to the axiomatic of absolute landmarks, located beyond the complexities of terrestrial life (Eliade, 1992b) this act subjecting the corporality to an effort of subordination and not of extinction. It is the ultimate goal of the yogic approach, the ultimate landmark which, in many forms and valences, has been constantly recommended and resumed throughout the ascetic

experiences of mankind. As claims Frunză (2021): „Meditation techniques – aimed to provide unity and authenticity in the human being ready to build the digital era – can prove efficiency by practicing in various registers of existence. They may also be a unifying factor for the four dimensions of human existence: physical, social, personal and spiritual. Through them, the human being may escape from the world, may abandon all personal conditionings and even escape from the self only to then find oneself and rediscover the ultimate fundamentals of the personal reality.”

5. Mircea Eliade’s contribution to the new perspective on spiritual reality represented by Yoga. Conceptual interferences.

Perhaps one of the most important components of Mircea Eliade’s contribution to the understanding of Indian spirituality is the fact that he paid attention to the complexity and limitlessness of its resources. Eliade investigated broad levels of Indian religious experience, overcoming the initial Western bias of the supposed Eastern primitivism. What proved to be inaccessible and inconsistent with the axiomatic of Western civilization was too quickly categorized as inferior and irrelevant to the cultural performance of the self-designed civilized world. Eliade pointed out the error of interpreting a different spiritual sphere through the dictionaries and matrices of the Western tradition. Only with the call made by metaphysics to Buddhist thought or with the deepening of psychoanalytic research into the area of Eastern religions did the idea of India’s cultural and religious infantilism fade. Eliade joined these efforts and, from the beginning of his scholarly activity, undertook the discovery of new levels of understanding for Indian spirituality, both theoretically, through thoroughly documented studies, and empirically, by practicing, for example, Yoga techniques (Moshe, 2010). In fact, his efforts were in line with the tradition of rediscovering the Indian spiritual universe, a tradition inaugurated by idealistic philosophies, especially by German Romanticism in the early nineteenth century, a European cultural direction that placed particular emphasis on the idea of regaining primordial and archetypal images, the beginnings of mankind but also of ancient languages such as Sanskrit. Concerns in this direction of cultural anthropology and the study of naturist mythology have completed the assumption of a new understanding of the Indian cultural space. Comparative philology, sociology, the history of religions, ethnology began to contribute to index studies from authors such as Max Muller to Georges Dumézil. Associated with this trend of Western culture, Eliade brought to the fore the idea that Indian thought can be considered, in terms of Western metaphysics, as existentialist thinking because, from its inception with the

early Upanishads, the central issue approached was that of conditioning and de-conditioning the human being. Based on this finding, Eliade believes, several central themes of Indian thought can be crystallized that may be of major interest to Western philosophy: the multiple conditionings of human existence, the temporality and captivity in history, the possibilities of cancelling the despair, the anguish generated by the dissolution and finitude imposed by time. Eliade also pointed out how Indian ascetic thinking and practices approached the problem of the unconscious before abysmal psychology and psychoanalysis, inaugurated and postulated by *Freud* and *Jung*. Eliade reluctantly accepted a resemblance between Yoga and psychoanalysis, noting that, "unlike Freudian psychoanalysis, Yoga does not see only libido in the unconscious" (Eliade, 1992a). "Unlike psychoanalysis, Yoga believes that the subconscious can be dominated by asceticism and even conquered by the techniques of unifying states of consciousness" (Eliade, 1992a). "[...] Yoga is right that the subconscious - paradoxical as it may seem - may be known, dominated and conquered" (Eliade, 1993). Thus, for the vision of Hinduism, in which Buddhism and Yoga can be integrated, the conditioning of the human being has its foundations in the individual unconscious. In order to be able to extinguish the influences of these negative psychic residues, it is necessary to practice asceticism, meditation and prayer. The difference noted by Eliade between the Western psychoanalytic tradition and the Eastern one is that for the first the emphasis is on the exercise of knowledge, the discovery of this area full of negative pulsating accumulations, while for the second, what matters is the practice to cancel the effect of these unconscious sources, with Yoga occupying a central place here. The common conceptual element remains the problem of time and the way of liberation from its mobility that generates the ephemeral, vanity, circularity of desire and suffering and, ultimately, the irreversible advance towards the final existential boundary represented by death (Eliade, 1993).

The immanent-transcendent or time-eternity duality, present in the Western tradition through the Judeo-Christian foundation, proves to be the central theme for the Hindu philosophical vision as well. The principle of liberation to a timeless zone, although it involves major differences, it also includes similar components, the individual ascetic effort being, for example, recommended both in Christian religious experiences and in Brahmanical theology and practice (Sandu, 2021).

6. Conclusions

The undeniable merit of Mircea Eliade is to offer the culture of the twentieth century and its decades, the image of Indian spirituality, in particular the practice of Yoga, as an inexhaustible resource of new perspectives on the meaning of human existence and its possibilities of being related to other levels (states) of consciousness. Mircea Eliade's cultural heritage, regarding the Yoga phenomenon, is not, as it can be seen from his entire fascinating work, a compilation of information and static landmarks, but on the contrary, an invitation to personal interpretations and assumptions regarding the understanding of the human spirit.

Going back to the blatant challenges the contemporary man is dealing with, we recall the studies of some enthusiasts of this research area, e.g. Duan-Porter et al., (2016); Lawrence et.al, (2013; 2017); Richter et al., (2016); Shaffer et al., (1997); Shohani et al., (2018); Streeter et al., (2010); Thayabaranathan et al., (2021; 2018; 2017) and so on, meant to open new horizons for understanding and prospecting physical and mental states in correlation with yoga practices, respectively how yoga can help manage pain, fear, recovery from various ailments and, why not, rediscovering and communicating with the self and the others, rebalancing emotions, re-evaluating and recalibrating intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions.

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