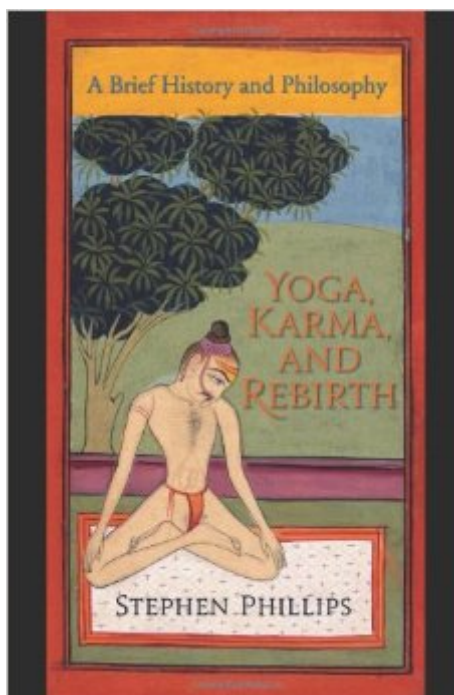


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Yoga, Karma, And Rebirth: A Brief History And Philosophy



Synopsis

For serious yoga practitioners curious to know the ancient origins of the art, Stephen Phillips, a professional philosopher and sanskritist with a long-standing personal practice, lays out the philosophies of action, knowledge, and devotion as well as the processes of meditation, reasoning, and self-analysis that formed the basis of yoga in ancient and classical India and continue to shape it today. In discussing yoga's fundamental commitments, Phillips explores traditional teachings of hatha yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, and tantra, and shows how such core concepts as self-monitoring consciousness, karma, nonharmfulness (ahimsa), reincarnation, and the powers of consciousness relate to modern practice. He outlines values implicit in bhakti yoga and the tantric yoga of beauty and art and explains the occult psychologies of koshas, skandhas, and chakras. His book incorporates original translations from the early Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Yoga Sutra (the entire text), the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, and seminal tantric writings of the tenth-century Kashmiri Shaivite, Abhinava Gupta. A glossary defining more than three hundred technical terms and an extensive bibliography offer further help to nonscholars. A remarkable exploration of yoga's conceptual legacy, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth* crystallizes ideas about self and reality that unite the many incarnations of yoga.

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Customer Reviews

Phillips is an expert scholar and expositor of classical Indian thought, and it comes through in this book. He sets as his goal the articulation and defense of a core set of Yogic theses--that is to say

the values, beliefs and attitudes which support of life of yogic practice. He argues that such core theses are the intellectual nucleus which support yoga whatever the particular school, and he develops them in the light of classical Indian philosophy and contemplative practice, questions of modern scientific discovery, and contemporary debate in academic philosophy. All of this is subtly blended together into a very readable, coherent book. He also provides a number of extensive translations of classical yoga texts as a supplement to the book, which solidifies its status as an excellent one-stop resource for students of yoga who are ready for a serious, philosophically oriented engagement with the tradition. I think that this book will be most useful to anyone interested in the practice and philosophy of Yoga or Eastern meditative thought more generally, as it helps the reader reflect on the core teachings of yoga as applied to a life of practice.

Most people who do yoga exercises are aware that they form part of a larger system of thought and practice that originated in ancient India. They know that the names of the poses they do are translations of Sanskrit words, which some teachers try valiantly to pronounce. A few teachers also recite Sanskrit prayers, and refer in passing to philosophical and religious ideas, such as karma and samadhi, that underlie the practice. For most students, that's about all they will ever know or care to know about the philosophy of yoga. But some will want to go further. For such students, Stephen Phillips's *Yoga, Karma and Rebirth* will be an invaluable companion. Phillips, a professor of Sanskrit and Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, is one of America's leading experts on Indian philosophy. He has also been practicing yoga for more than thirty years, and brings an insider's knowledge to his explanations of mental concentration and the downward-facing dog. With an accessible informality honed by years of classroom teaching, Phillips walks the reader through difficult philosophical concepts but never distorts his material through oversimplification. There is a great deal of substance in the introduction and the five chapters making up the body of the book, but for the advanced student the real treat will be Phillips's translations of extracts from classic yoga texts such as the *Yoga Sutra* and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, which fill five considerable appendixes. Altogether Phillips's book gives serious students of yoga all they need to take their practice to a higher level.

I must admit at first glance and preliminary reading this book appeared sloppily written and incomprehensible, yet if you're brave enough to venture past the first chapter you are in for a journey into the world of Vedic wonder. This overview has the truth of the Vedic scriptures but written in twenty first century language, balancing that fine line between academic and comprehensive. In just

a few chapter and two hundred pages, Phillips manages to create a in-depth understanding of what exactly the ancient Yogis thought about Yoga, meditation and aeschetic practice, in addition to a thorough analysis of such universal concepts as the Self, the Soul, the Bardo, the after life and Right mind (or highest mind).I cannot recommend this book enough, especially if you want to know what exactly Yoga is for, or about, and what can be accomplished through it's use.If I should subtract any 'points' it would be about this latter notion: Phillips clearly believes that Yoga can create almost supernatural "powers" (his words, not mine) which at times seems a bit over the top; He even admits that a large part of the Yoga community are sceptical of these supposed powers. But, naturally any such publication must take Some form of stand, if for nothing else than to Guide the reader, or make clear the distinction between the different school of thoughts.Though Yoga is practised by both Hindus and Buddhists, but beware that Phillips clearly takes the view of the Hindus - i.e accepting the notion of a permanent soul - and though I do so myself, and even though Phillips also - briefly - sketches the ideas of Buddhist Yoga, he obviously has a "bee in his bonnet" regarding Buddhist denial of the Self within Yoga and, again, I do agree with him, but it should be made clear that this is a book for aspiring Hindus, and less for aspiring Buddhist.I implore you to read this concise and in-depth overview of universal ideas in Vedic and Yoga culture.

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