

# Yoga: serious discipline essay sample

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The discipline of yoga claims that to identify the self with the mind or the body is to be mistaken. This concept of the true self is presented and formulated in different texts, including the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad-Gītā, and the Yoga-Sūtras of Patanjali. A thread that connects these three works is the yogic principle of the self-nature divide. The true self is considered distinct from the material world, perception and even thought.

In the dialogues and narratives of the Upaniṣads the self is viewed as no different than the self of all other beings and no different than Brahman (or the ultimate reality). This metaphysical concept is the foundation for much of the discussions that take place in the Upaniṣads because it unifies all selves and shows that apparent differences between beings are all associations with body or mind, thus not true characteristics of the self.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣad, Yajnavalkya aims to explain the separation between the self and a person's mind and body. He uses this repeated claim: “ this self of yours who is present within, but is different from the , whom the does not know, whose body is, and who controls from within – he is the inner controller, the immortal” (Olivelle, 41-44). The blank is filled with many different aspects of the divine and physical world then filled with faculties of perception and thought. The repetition shows that the relationship of the true self is the same to all things; a controller and perceiver. The matter of perception is essential because the self is the ultimate perceiver and as such it must exist outside of the physical and the divine to perceive any of it.

In the Gita Krishna uses this same distinction when counseling Arjuna about making decisions. They engage in dialogue about whether renunciation or

the yoga of action is better. Krishna explains that in both cases one is still acting because it is the nature of the body and the mind to act. The way to release one's self from desire and action is to realize that the true self is not a part of this acting. In Krishna's view, to act in accordance with the true self is not to act with thought for the fruit (or consequence) of the action, rather to act without ego and with devotion to Krishna. Krishna urges Arjuna to "[refer] all your deeds to me / and [focus] solely on the self / desireless, devoid of ego / free of fever, join the battle" (Flood & Martin, 22).

This devotion makes more sense when one considers that Krishna (like Brahman) is a manifestation of ultimate reality and thus devotion to Krishna is devotion to the self, to other selves and to Brahman. The Gita asserts that one must act with devotion to Krishna, not what appears to be the case i.e. death, material gain, bodily pleasure etc. These apparent things appeal to the mind and the body, but the devotion to Krishna appeals to the true self.

Yoga is a philosophy of action, as expounded in the Yoga-Sūtras of Patanjali. The aim of yoga is the ability to control one's mind and body, and in doing so realize that the self is not either one. This true self is described as the light of the mind, and as Purusa the Seer. Through this control, which is called Somadhi, the yogi "attains a state devoid of differentiation between knower, knowable and knowledge" (Satchidananda, 60). This oneness is the essence of the yogic view of self. The Sūtras also provide a manifestation of this concept in Isvara, similar to Krishna and Brahman. A fixed object or personage to meditate upon and to aspire to emulate in practice. The Sūtras may not consider the true self to be one that acts, but the

implications of the self-nature divide are still shown to be very significant to the practice of yoga.