

The Essence of Yoga is beyond

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Introduction

For all human beings there exist traditions that seek to understand the real essence of being human. Many of these traditions have existed from ancient times¹. These traditions have in common certain techniques related to the mind, to the body and to the breath. In India these practices are codified as yoga². This paper limits its scope to the similarities between two ancient cultures with such practices: the Aotearoa/New Zealand Maori Tohunga healing tradition and the Indian yogic tradition.

These two communities are separated by vast tracts of ocean however there are agreed ontological assumptions. These assumptions include- 1) life as an interconnected and ongoing process of moving energy, 2) the human body is comprised of matter and spirit, 3) methods exist that realize the Self, 4) wellbeing begins at the subtle level of existence, 5) there are universal and individual ethical laws for human beings and 6) the essence of yoga is beyond the sense organs and is practical.

The Indian yogic tradition states that the ultimate purpose of such practices is human evolution. For Maori this knowledge is sacred and has been passed on through such processes

as whakapapa³, cosmological stories, *karakia*/song, protocols and carvings within the meeting houses. Whakapapa is a Maori word that is defined as the activity of laying flat and to recite in proper order for example: genealogies and legends. However it also encompasses information about creation, the natural world, the universe and the subtle nature of the human being (Royal,1998). In recent times this universal knowledge has been preserved by Maori for Maori- a reflection in part of the effects of colonialisation.

Both Maori and Indian traditions have a diversity of theory and schools and for the purpose of this paper we will understand from the perspective of Sankhya philosophy and Maori cosmology as shared in whakapapa and

¹ Feuerstein, G. (2002). The Yoga tradition- Its history, literature, philosophy and practice. Bhavana Books and Prints, USA.

² Buhemann, G. (2007). Eighty-four Asanas in Yoga: A survey of traditions. DK. Printward (P) Ltd, New Delhi.

³ Whakapapa is described by Charles Royal as all encompassing term: "It is the genius of the Māori world for it was the tool by which our ancestors accounted for the origins and nature of the world which were further explained and embellished by myth and legend. It was also the tool employed to explain, locate and predict phenomena...Whakapapa is a symbol set within which are encapsulated the Māori world's deepest thoughts and perspectives on the nature of the universe and features of the human condition. Whakapapa is used to order the evolutionary processes and patterns from the beginnings of time to the birth of the world in which we now dwell, the world known as Te Ao Mārama. Whakapapa is a symbolic tool, employed by the old-time philosophers to apprehend, to comprehend, to analyse the world and reality in all its forms. These include both the physical forms of the world as well as the invisible forms." (Royal, 1998:78).

from direct testimony of Maori and Raja Yoga practitioners⁴.

Review of Literature

1) LIFE AS AN INTERCONNECTED AND ONGOING PROCESS OF MOVING ENERGY

Indian Sankhya philosophy and Maori share an understanding of certain natural laws. From these two traditions the human being represents a universe of realities from the gross manifestation of matter seen as the physical body through to the finest levels of reality existing at unseen levels of partialised nature. Each of these aspects of the human being influences the other, has movement and is 'alive'⁵.

From this perspective there is an understanding of influence and connectedness through physical, mental and spiritual realms. For Maori this knowledge is preserved within the cosmology stories⁶ and whakapapa⁷. The

⁴ Phd thesis: Spiritual Brotherhood and Meditation within the Sahaj Marg Raja Yoga Community: Preliminary findings. Currently being written up and includes two groups: Maori and Sahaj Marg Raja Yoga practitioners from around the world. Peace and Conflict Studies Center and Bioethics Department, Dunedin School of Medicine, University of Otago, New Zealand. Candidate: Janine Joyce.

⁵ Anantharaman, T. (1996). *Ancient Yoga and Modern Science*. Project of History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, India.

⁶ To understand the following story it is contextually necessary to read the separation of Ranginui (sky- father) and Paptuanuku (Mother-Earth). There is a story of Tāne casting stars upon Ranginui (sky-father) in order that the children might also see their father- "Light is referred to in the Te Ahukaramū manuscript as the sun shining outside and beyond Ranginui. The children theorise that by separating their parents, the light will shine between them and the world will become illuminated. I believe this is metaphorical of understanding and enlightenment. In this way, the creation of Te Ao Mārama (present world) is metaphorical of the

emphasis on a common connection or genealogy enables a connected relationship between human beings and the environment. This connected relationship is further enhanced by the understanding that all things have mauri or life force.

There is a Maori story that illustrates this - '*Te Moko Nui o Io i Te Kunenga*'. This story tells that it was 'Io' (transcendent source) who thought out the combination of all of the elements in the universe, to build those things that would bring about the miracles that were needed for the universe to come alive, to foster humanity, intellect, spirit, love, peace, life and death, not as a final cycle, but as a continuing and ever growing cycle, replenishing itself on the energies being released on the completion of its life cycle, then creating of itself the very diversity of nature that is needed to survive. Similarly Sankhya philosophy views the whole universe is created of two materials- Akasha (omnipresent, all-penetrating existence) and Prana (infinite omnipresent manifesting power). Akasha is everything that has form and everything that is the result of combination is evolved from this. It becomes the air. It becomes all the liquids and all the solids, the sun, the earth, the human body, the plants- everything that exists. At the beginning all is akasha and at the end all dissolves back into akasha. The power that creates the universe from akasha is

inward experience of understanding and enlightenment" (Royal, 1998: 61).

⁷ Charles Royal (1998) has completed a fascinating compilation of various tribal whakapapa explaining the creation of the world. He examines the similarities and differences of these whakapapa and posits a possible pan- Maori cosmology. To paraphrase he describes that each whakapapa has a transcendent source. For the tribes of Ngā Puhi, Ngāi Tahu and Waikato/Maniapoto, this transcendent source is Io. For the tribes contributing to the Te Ahukaramū and Te Rangihacata/Mātene Te Whiwhi manuscripts, this source is Te Pō or Te Kore or both.

prana. It is prana that becomes force, motion, and actions of all objects in the universe. Prana in its original state is the sum total of all the forces in the universe, whether mental or physical.

2) HUMAN BODY IS COMPRISED OF MATTER AND SPIRIT

Accordingly both traditions have knowledge that the human being is made up of both matter and spirit and that these dimensions are veiled from each other and difficult for the organ based senses to perceive. These dimensions of reality are superimposed on each other and represent differing frequencies of moving energy. Self-realization is the process whereby the vital life force is redirected from the lower to the higher regions along the nerve centres of the spine. These channels are affected by blockages in the subtle energy of the body caused by attachment and desire. When these channels are open the human being experiences life in a different way. As one participant stated:

“Who are you and how is your heart?”

To the centre of kauwaiou is where the heart is.

The heart is that ability to enlighten and connect out to others.

The others aren't just people, it is this land, it is this everything.

I am part of you and you are part of me,

and everything above as below.

My concern is that kotahitanga or the ideology of politics

will restrict Maori from growing and transforming.

It's not about loss-

it is about strengthening what it is that we are and

those intrinsic values that we have to be more than we need to be.”

(Tainui Maori sister)

Yoga practitioners identify *prana* (breath/ vital life force) as accumulated in eight main centres along the spinal column. These centres are located in the subtle body and correspond to the nerve plexuses in the physical body⁸. The centres are known by the Sanskrit term '*chakra*' which means a 'circling motion or a wheel'. From these chakras are channels that redistribute energy. In deep meditation yogic practitioners have described these centres as flowers with different form, colour and vibration.⁹

For Maori- *Te Aka* (cosmic vine) constitutes the different aspects of energy, intelligence and consciousness within the universe and the body. This is similar to the Indian notion of the *ida*, *pingala* and *sushumna nadi* (flow) that go from the base of the spine through to the top of the crown and above. *Te aka* runs along the spine and is naturally linked to the: 1) *hamano* (pure soul), 2) *Manawa* (breath/ spirit), 3) *ata* (shadow/ astral body) and 4) *kiko* (physical body). Each level influences the nervous system within the physical body.

Both traditions have described such centres of subtle energy in similar ways. For example: the yogic tradition has described the first chakra of energy (*mooladhara*) as a red coloured four-

⁸ Swahananda, Swami. (1984). Chandogya Upanisad. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India.

⁹ “In deep meditation, the yogis have seen these chakras and they described them as lotus flowers. Though the chakras are situated in the subtle body, their influence extends to the gross and causal bodies. Each particular chakra vibrates at a particular rate and velocity”, (161)

petaled lotus. Its functions of influence are the excretory and reproductive organs and the reproductive glands and hormonal secretions. Similarly for the Maori the base of the vine is situated within the genital organs and called *ahua*:

Upon the actual vine the ahua is described as a flower with the image of a woman upon it. This image is its blue print, Hine-ahu-one, the first woman or human to ever be created, which the ahua uses as a map to direct all bodily functions (Robinson, 2005: 228).

3) METHODS EXIST WHICH ALLOW SELF-REALISATION

For yoga practitioners there are replicable techniques or methods that allow access to the inner realms of self and therefore a deeper intuitive knowledge and perception (Prabhavananda, 2002). The work of Maharshi Patanjali documents the physiological, psychological and spiritual changes that a human-being experiences in this process of reducing and purifying the veils that prevent realization and awareness of the soul. These processes include: *asana* which mean posture or to hold steady and *pranayama* breathing techniques that bring the gross manifestation of *prana* which is breath into the body. These techniques overtime begin to facilitate a deep concentration and awareness that goes beyond the physical body. One of the side effects of these methods is improved physiological and mental health.

The following from Samuel Robinson (2005) describes similar processes of training for Maori healers:

The body was trained in whakawheua or 'stance' where it was disciplined not to distract the mind. The ata was trained and purified by ha, the technique of even, deep breathing. The manawa or mind was disciplined in te-pu-manawa, the

art of concentration. Throughout the training of an akoako (aspirant), without his knowing it, he was trained in the ways of perfecting and mastering himself in the three lesser parts. This opened the way for mana to pass down from the hamano, manifesting through the lower levels by karakia or perfect prayer, which is the origin of tohunga power (Robinson, 2005: 219).

The Maori story of the first God Tanes¹⁰ ascent through the ten heavens to retrieve the three baskets of knowledge¹¹ alludes to the yogic processes of enlightenment and human evolution. Maori therefore have access to this same knowledge which is communicated through symbols contained in weaving, carving, in the layout and protocols on the *marae*/ meeting house and in stories. The path of

¹⁰ Tane was one of the seventy sons held in the darkness between the creative and intelligent energies Papa and Rangi. It was Tane who was declared leader of the Gods because he separated the parental energies held tight by the forces of Te po and brought light into the world of darkness. From there he created many aspects of matter including the first human- the female Hine-ahu-one (woman formed from earth) (Robinson, 2005). Tanes children are comprised of all that is alive on the surface of planet earth including the rivers, the mountains, the trees, the animals, the ocean, the sea creatures, the birds and the rocks. This also included a connection to the sky father- Ranganui and all that is in his domain including the winds, the stars, the planets and the celestial beings. In the words of Samuel Timoti Robinson: "This was the blanket for our Mother Earth and the atua (God's) called the garden Pohutakawa. It covered her whole body and adorned their beautiful mother completely. Nothing was left undone with springs, rivers, vegetation and forms of land life appearing from the seed of Tane. All things can be traced back to this one garden, be they plants, animals, reptiles or humans, and Io became Io-mua or Io-Forerunner the ancestor of all things.

¹¹ Tane was chosen after a test to be the one who would travel to the tenth heaven to bring back the baskets of knowledge. These were: the basket of the inner parent (Te kite Ururu-Matua), the basket of the inner abode (Te kite Ururu-Rangi) and the basket of the inner ability (Te Kete Ururu-Tau)

knowledge or enlightenment is seen to be difficult, sacred and not for the many.

For such yogic techniques the purpose is to assist in the evolution of human consciousness leading towards harmony in diversity and a peaceful happy life. Similarly for Maori, the goal of life appears to be beyond individual self-realization and is focused towards a collective goal for the people. In the words of Samuel Robinson:

The purpose of life is to empower and be empowered by the mana of the land, the mana of the people and the mana of the atua/ God, to be among those that renew the world, to make the world progress towards perfection and peace. Our mission is to be kaitiaki/ guardian, a protector of the land, a guardian of the atua and carer of the people (Robinson, 2005:278).

4) WELLBEING BEGINS AT THE SUBTLE LEVEL

Accordingly for traditional Maori- health was understood to be due to the flow of *mauri* (life force) from the *hamano* through the spirit, through the *ata* and into the body (see Figure: 1). Any blockage in the flow of *mauri* could manifest as mental and physical illness (Robinson, 2005). A similar concept exists within yoga as it is the flow of *prana* (life force energy) via subtle energetic channels of *nadi* and *chakra* that determines the health of the body (Swahananda, 1984). In this way of understanding all disease is psychosomatic and begins in the mind as blockages in the flow of *prana*. However all of life contains *prana/ life force energy* and as such health is also pragmatically reliant upon the quality of nutrition, genetics and other lifestyle factors.

5) UNIVERSAL AND INDIVIDUAL ETHICAL LAWS FOR HUMAN BEINGS

Practices situated in the context of these two philosophies give rise to natural ethical laws related to human beings and the environment. In yoga these natural laws are known as *nama* and *niyama* and simply mean the knowledge, practice and development of internal attitudes pertaining to both universal laws and individual ethical laws.¹²

For Maori such ethical laws are known as *ti kanga* (correct practices and protocols). Each tribe has its own particular *ti kanga* shaped by the natural environment and history of the land and people. In general however they are based upon similar notions of right conduct with people and with the natural world.¹³ Many of these values are beyond the individual human being and are concerned with the interconnected

¹² These include: non-hurting, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence (conservation of energy), forgiveness, stability, compassion, humility and simplicity, moderate diet and cleanliness. The universal ethics include austerities (natural tests of will power, strength of mind and body), contentment, belief in the supreme or faith, charity, worship of the supreme being, listening to discourses of spiritual scriptures, modesty, a discerning intellect, repetition of mantra and sacrifice. Due to the knowledge that the mind and body system is in a constant process of fluctuation and change, these attitudes must be practiced in a disciplined manner moment by moment. It is the goal of yoga to ultimately cease the fluctuations of the mind.

¹³ 1) conservation practises shown in the harvesting of food and resources, 2) *manaaki*, meaning to show respect or kindness; 3) *aroha*, which is to show care, empathy, charity and respect; 4) *hau*, which means to respect, promote and maintain vitality; 5) *kaitiakitanga*, which includes stewardship, guardianship and wise use of resources; and 6) *hapai* meaning to uplift others. In particular there is acknowledgement of the role of human beings is act as caretakers of the *mauri*, the life principle/ spirit in nature and each other (Tolich, 2001).

nature of reality seen and unseen. In the words of one participant:

“Tikanga are protocols and processes and ways of being and ways of doing that are across culture, across the realms as well. It’s about being accountable. For me, it’s about tikanga being set out before us and acknowledging that those who have gone before us are still with us and still guiding and still watching and still there.....Tikanga is not specific to Maori or whatever it crosses all those gaps- it’s about honesty and doing things purposively. (Waitaha Maori sister)

Objective and Hypothesis

The essence of yoga is beyond the sense organs and it is practical

The true essence of yoga is beyond the sense organs and develops when we begin to understand or realize that there are certain energies within the body that allow us to connect with all things. The processes of connection involve the knowledge that 'I am here' and the ability to concentrate. To begin it is a process of connection with our families, our children and our loved ones but later we open to connection with a much wider world. Remember in Sankhya philosophy the whole cosmos is energy. The whole cosmos is vibration. The human being is uniquely equipped after processes of purification, pranayama, asana and meditation¹⁴ to connect with all frequencies of vibration. Ultimately yoga is the awareness aligned with the capacity to connect internal energies and frequencies.

¹⁴ Always under the careful guidance of a teacher or spiritual Master. This is a science and precision counts for much in terms of efficiency, safety and outcome. Do not be concerned if it takes time to find such a one. It is the nature of the spiritual realm that the teacher / master always comes to the sincere seeker. There are no barriers in this.

Research Methods

In a qualitative study on spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood seventy Raja Yoga practitioners from around the world were asked about their experiences of this concept¹⁵. In keeping with holistic views outlined in Yogic and Maori texts, all participants knew themselves as an individual consciousness with an awareness or realization of self as more than body and gave examples of a self which included spirit/ *wairua* and unseen energies. In the same study a smaller sample of Maori women were asked over a series of interviews about their experiences of this.

Result

The following example highlights that before one can experience spiritual brotherhood or sisterhood you have to realize that you are a sacred spiritual being. All the other aspects of practice including yama, niyama, remembrance of connection are only a beginning knowledge.

“How we fit into the ecology, into the cosmology, into mythology and it comes back to knowing who you are. If you know who you are and you have a whakapapa that’s Maori or if you have a whakapapa that’s from Glastonbury and the ancients of the Avalon’s. You know if you have the ancients of the Scottish there is the wisdom of the Celts. There is also the wisdom here in this whenua/ this land for everyone. But those adolescents- were the beginning of mankind’s relationship with this land but are not the end point. They are a really good starting point to understand wairuatanga, manaakitanga

¹⁵ Phd thesis: Spiritual Brotherhood and Meditation within the Sahaj Marg Raja Yoga Community: Preliminary findings. Currently being written up and includes two groups: Maori and Sahaj marg practitioners from around the world. Peace and Conflict Studies Center and Bioethics Department, Dunedin School of Medicine, University of Otago, New Zealand. Candidate: Janine Joyce.

but without that intrinsic sacredness, spirit- who are you as an individual- you can't go beyond."

When asked what this feels like as a way of being in the world. The following words are shared:

"What does it feel like- it feels peaceful, you know I want to stamp my hand on the table and scream it's about capacity, it's about change, it's about growth, it's about seeing what our true potential is. We don't know what our potential is. IF we truly opened our hearts- do we know? Have we truly ever experienced a collective consciousness on this planet that is truly connected and truly about heart? I mean I don't know if we have and it is beyond even my comprehension to think what that could look like. But it would feel incredibly scary and I think that's where the resistance for people comes from; I feel we want to control, we want to be able to predict, and we want to know what's going to happen next. And so we miss things. When you open up your heart and allow things to flow and not be inhibited by the mind and our pre-socialized understanding about what this world is all about- it's dizzying. Because when you do open your heart to experiences without that static, without that buffer- life is different. Life is absolutely different and how we engage with it."

In this excerpt we get the sense of potentiality, of a shift in consciousness and what this might be like for a group of human beings to experience but we also get to see the self-created fears. The prejudicial barriers based upon ignorance of the true nature of the human being.

All participants were clear that other realms were real and that human beings received guidance and training from beyond. This was a process of correctly interpreting the signs that life gave and also through the frequency of intuition and feeling. It was a natural process. A

process of correct knowledge, detachment and discrimination or vairagya.

"Sometimes I think that the learning comes from another realm and we impart that on this realm to just get through. Because really this is a test, yeah and some days you do it really well and other times you're like: "ohh I think I could just leave this now" and then "oh no you're not". So I'm really firm- everybody has a role and a responsibility and you might think that you can walk away from that but in some way or shape or form they will make you know what that is."

The process of being multi-dimensional in this way involved, tests and signs and moments of unlooked for coincidence.

"As you know, our journey takes us through, over, under around many obstacles and this trip certainly was not shy of any of these. But one thing I do remember was this. In one meditation I remember seeing a Tupuna in the sky. He cut a massive figure. Wearing the traditional cloak across one shoulder, holding a tiaha (fighting weapon) in one hand with a white feather in his hair, I felt so privileged that someone was here for me. One year later at my father's dinner table I felt this person looking at me. When I looked around I saw this photo of that Tupuna I saw in the skies at the ashram. When I mentioned this to my father his casual response floored me. When I told him the story 'I'm not surprised. There is some thought that Maori originated from the Himalaya's and that Tupuna is where your middle name originates from Te Koharangi- A gift from God". (Maori sister)

Many participants as children had a consciousness that was open to a wider vibration of knowledge. Many described the negative influences that society imposed that led to self-doubt and closing of these capacities

"When I was a young kid I used to see halos. I was bought up in the Morman church for a few

years. I would watch the elders and go and look at these gorgeous halos and because they were elders I would think that it was okay. You know they are halo's- it's all good! They were meant to have them because they were church elders. God has them so these people have them too. And then I'd see little colors and occasionally I'd get little feelings and I'd see things and things would come out of my mouth and then I was taught that was evil and wrong so in my teenage years I really struggled with seeing and feeling things because it was wrong." (Tainui Maori sister)

For another participant her experiences of connection involved the expanded levels of seeing and hearing and sensing. When she refers to 'they' she is talking about her tipuna/ancestors.

"It started when I was about four. They used to yack away and it used to really upset my mother. Apparently it was because of me that we couldn't go to my grandad's funeral because I said "no its okay mum he's just sitting over there and he's telling me that old ladies mean. That old lady over there is mean (which was my grandmother)...So it was the only tangi/funeral that they never took us to and my older sister says 'if only you'd shut your mouth, can't you just shut your mouth' and I'm like 'okay'. I'd find things that had been lost. Like some people thought they had been lost for ever and I used to drag my sisters around because I'm the third out of four so I don't know how I managed to do that." (Waitaha sister)

Spiritual family between human beings was described as an automatic recognition and a process of attunement to intuition. From this there was knowledge of how to support each other in the physical realm and the need for words was often unnecessary.

"You become part of the whanau/ family because there's this automatic connection and actually everybody is attuned to their intuition. And so you know when something's up and you know 'do I need to do anything about it' or does someone else. People within this room do that without having being told to do it- they pick up, we all pick up on. The right person then approaches the person rather than being left. Does that make sense?" (Waitaha Maori sister)

Others described this more esoterically in terms of human beings emitting energy that connects each other. It is this example that practically illustrates the notion of all of life as energy in Sankhya philosophy. It also suggests that times and space are not real constructs at certain levels of vibration.

"For me it's about a connectedness and I suppose it's the image that I have is this light ball which is emanating from each of us as individuals and it's that connection that happens in the 'and space' my teacher calls it. Reweaving the web. It's those little nodules. I see me as a nodule on that woven world and when we have that wholeness then we are able to reconnect to others. Others and ourselves in the past, present, future, and in the now. I suppose brotherhood also elicits healing. Healing connectedness". (Tainui Maori Sister)

According to Sankhya philosophy cosmic energy is everywhere and one of the goals of yoga is to learn to join with this energy. It is a process of learning to find the cosmic frequency and tuning into the truth of nature and to distant sounds. In this process we become like receiving stations of light- gifted healthy bodies and able to receive vibrational information from all sources and, if we choose, create perfection in this world.

Discussion

What is the point of knowing this? Because if we don't know then we pursue and convey truth according to our own level of approach. When we do this yoga may be regulated to exercise only or a way of calming our minds. It loses its potential to completely remodel the human personality from an evolutionary perspective. The yogic personality once self is realized is a personality based upon sensitivity, awareness and a deep inner connectivity with all of creation. There is no separation.

It is feeling connected all the time, even

without verbal or

any other form of physical contact.”

(Belarusian brother, Sahaj Marg)

There is only oneness and this human being cannot hurt another knowingly because at the highest levels of approach to do so is felt as their own pain. But beyond this is pure love and it is natural for this human being to relate from this perspective. Please do not imagine that this human being won't disappoint you. The process of approach is infinite and we are all at different stages of awareness and confidence. Throughout the course of the day it is difficult not to transgress the mana of another unknowingly.

So for the yoga therapist- yoga is beyond technique and goes into the unseen world of frequency. This felt frequency between teacher and student. It is the attitude of caring that creates the bond of love, which creates the capacity to heal. It has been said that the pranic energy of love is the most subtle and most powerful energy in the cosmos. It is a forceless force and comes from the pure mind. For the researcher it is the attitude towards the phenomena that releases the truth, the quality of love that leads to the clearest answer. Nature's

topics only truly open as from the beloved to the lover.

The essence of Yoga takes us beyond to a place where we know ourselves as light-weight, where we know ourselves as purity and as sound. From this place we are vibration capable of altering our frequencies to those around us. Once we know this our methods of enquiry becomes different, our interests refine and we seek to expand the knowledge that we currently have. What would knowledge look like from this perspective? It would no longer represent separated compartments of expertise. We would find a joining of disciplines and understandings. If our cosmos is one then so too is all knowledge.

The purpose of yoga would not be to see prana or develop special capabilities it would be natural to have gone beyond that to a natural awareness and attunement with each other. In this space the mechanics and gross techniques of what we do are less important than the quality of purity in the mind and the capacity to connect as fields of energy.

“It's like when you go onto a Marae and you do the hongī¹⁶.

And there's somebody (you've not met before) and you actually stop.

You both stop.

I always say kia ora (hello) and hongī but then

all of a sudden you just have a feeling and

it's there and you are pressed together and

it might only be half a second but it feels like an eternity.

¹⁶ Hongi: traditional form of greeting where the noses are pressed side by side and hands are clasped together with eyes open.

*It's like you know that person,
there's something- you know the energy.
You recognise the energy, and
that person recognises your energy.
That's happened-
well actually that happens quite a lot."*

(Maori Waitaha sister)

A conscious connecting field of energy has the capability to affect the other. According to Sankhya and Maori philosophy this is what we each have the capacity to do. All our practices eventually lead to this purity of mind and self-realization. You and I are each other not just at a primitive level of understanding in the exchange of gases but at a fundamental level of thought and prana we are one. Your thought-feeling can uplift or deflate me, it can encourage or it can damage because we are one. And because we are one there is no limits based upon distance or time. We train our concentration to tune in and then we are there at the deeper internal levels of self.

*"And actually at the end of the day
even though some of us weren't physically
present,
it isn't like where are the sisters?
We're actually there [others agree].
We get caught up in the physical presence when
the non-physical is stronger
and it's just about calling on that.
Say "hey guys we need some ahi (support) out
here".
Invite something, I need help here."*

(Waitaha Maori sister)

Conclusion

THE ESSENCE OF YOGA IS BEYOND

This paper has sought to begin a dialogue between two traditions with a similar general understanding about reality and the subtle nature of the human being. It seems that the techniques of what is known as yoga in India and understandings about the nature of reality can be found in the Maori healing tradition and cosmology. This is perhaps not surprising as many cultures and traditions have developed both the interest and the capacity to realize both the gross and subtle forms of body and reality.¹⁷

It is likely that there may be differences between the two philosophies and as such further examination is required. One tradition has described the topic scientifically and the other metaphorically. Regardless, both have gathered knowledge via direct observation, rational inference and verbal cognition or recorded testimony.¹⁸

¹⁷ In the words of Swami Swahananda: *"In yoga, life and consciousness are known as prakriti and purusha; in tantra they are known as Shakti and Shiva. In hatha yoga they are called ida and pingala; in taoism, yin and yang, and in physics, matter and energy. They have their own names, in different times and different philosophies. This physical body as it is seen is the gross perception. If you look at this body with psychic eyes, or with the eyes of specialized and sophisticated electronic equipment, perhaps you would understand that it has its own subtle counterpart also."* (Swahananda, 1984: 8).

¹⁸ In the Pratyaksanumanagamah pramanani (sutra 17) Patanjali states: *"Direct observation, rational inference and verbal cognition (or recorded testimony) constitute the sources of right knowledge."* (Ananthuraman, 1996: 27).

The preliminary analysis of shared stories on lived experience of spiritual brotherhood/sisterhood from Maori and Raja yoga practitioners suggest that a wider consciousness is being experienced by many ordinary human beings in a natural way.

The essence of yoga takes us into the higher subtle realms of who we are and for many of us it is beyond our everyday consciousness. However, the essence of yoga invites us to dive deep into the potentiality that is contained within ourselves. Contained as a latent potential within our nervous systems and realized through the disciplined, regulated time tested practices of asana, breathing, purification, meditation and attitudes of aroha (love) and connection. With a practical realization of this truth comes the potential for a more connected and respectful relationship with our planet and with each other.

The challenge for yogic teachers, researchers, healers and therapists of all traditions is to convey these subtle truths.

Acknowledgement

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