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## *Yoga: What For?*

WE CAN PRACTICE YOGA for all sorts of reasons: to remain fit; to stay healthy or recover our health; to balance our nervous system; to calm our busy mind; and to live in a more meaningful way. All these goals are worthy of our attention and pursuit.

Yet, traditionally, Yoga has for several millennia been employed as a pathway out of suffering (*duhkha*) and to liberation (*moksha, nirvāna*), or enlightenment (*bodhi*). Long ago, the masters of Yoga recognized that we can never be completely satisfied with life until we have found the source of happiness beyond pleasure and pain. Even when we are completely fit and healthy, enjoy a relatively balanced nervous system, and live in an apparently meaningful way, deep down we still feel ill at ease. We just have to dig deep enough to go past all the layers of limited satisfaction—the kind of satisfaction that depends on having just the right sort of external circumstance. We can easily discover whether we are truly content and happy when we lose our job, have our marriage break up, or have a good friend suddenly turn against us. In the case of a great Yoga master, these events will not cause as much as a ripple in his or her mind.

Upon enlightenment, when the mind is free from obscurations, neither pleasure nor pain will diminish our inner freedom. We are pure Consciousness and at one with the Source of all things. This is what the Hindu Yoga tradition also calls “Self-realization.” The Self, or Spirit, is supraconscious, immortal, eternally free, and unspeakably blissful. From a yogic point of view, there is no higher attainment than this; nor is there a pursuit more worthy than this. For when we have realized our true nature, as pure Consciousness or Awareness, whatever we do will be infused with the freedom and bliss of that realization. We are all right in any circumstance and can enrich all circumstances with wisdom and compassion so as to benefit other beings.

Whatever our personal reasons for practicing Yoga may be, it is good to bear Yoga’s traditional goal in mind. This will prevent us from getting stuck with a particular limited achievement. Yoga seeks to tap into our *full* potential.

Shambhala Publications, Inc.  
Horticultural Hall  
300 Massachusetts Avenue  
Boston, Massachusetts 02115  
www.shambhala.com

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition  
Printed in the United States of America

Ⓢ This edition is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute z39.48 Standard. Distributed in the United States by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada Ltd

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Feuerstein, Georg.  
The deeper dimension of Yoga: theory and practice /  
Georg Feuerstein.

p. cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-57062-935-8

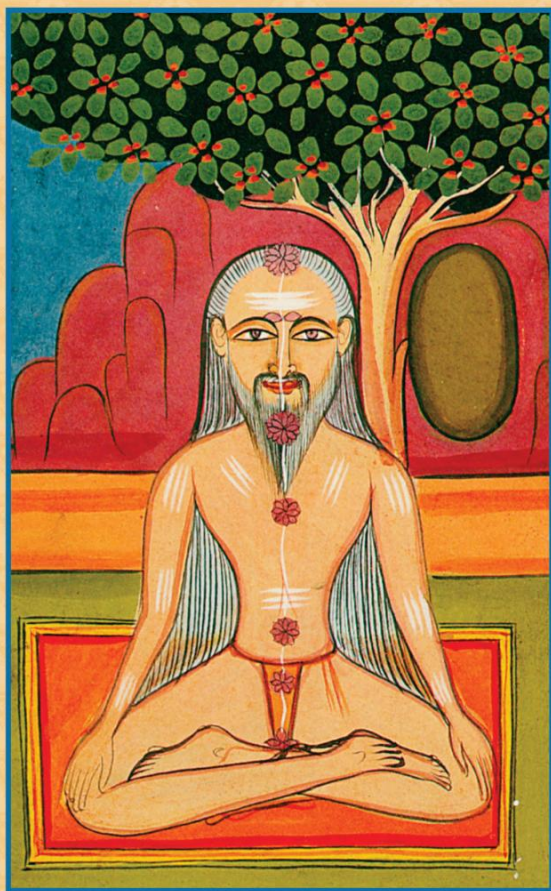
1. Yoga. I. Title.

B132.Y6 F48752003

181'.45—dc21

2002014201

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DEEPER DIMENSION  
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THEORY AND PRACTICE

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