

## SILENCE AND CREATIVITY

By Pete Yates

### INTRODUCTION

There is an ancient and vital connection between Yoga and the arts. The tangkas of Tibet, the temple architecture and classical music of India, the ink landscapes of Sung dynasty China, and the calligraphic expressions of Zen are all good examples of this connection.

These arts are at once expressions of the meditation of their creators and invitations to those enjoying the art to enter into meditative states.

Some of this art is deeply traditional with little room for innovation, (though of course such traditions must have been initiated by an innovation). Even under this condition though, it is thought that the vitality of the result is dependent on the devoted and meditative consciousness of the artist at the time of creation. By contrast, some 'spiritual art' is spontaneous and improvisational and it is this which is of more concern to us in this context. In some cases, a blend of both elements is present: Indian classical music for instance is improvised but usually within very strict traditional frameworks.

In modern times, we associate the arts with the notion of creativity. Is there then a connection between Yoga and creativity as its ancient connection with certain arts suggests? And how are we to understand 'creativity'?

In what follows I address these questions. I offer a picture of creativity which extends beyond traditional art forms and suggest that there is a profound relationship between that creativity and Yoga. That relationship, I try to indicate, is such that Yoga practice enhances creativity and that creative practice can itself be a Yoga.

### WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

Human creativity has many variants and it would be a mistake to offer an over-simplified account of it or to underestimate the difficulty of elucidating it. However, we can say (for our purposes) that to create is to bring into being, for a period of time, an entirely *new* configuration of matter, ideas, symbols, sounds, and/or social-cultural formations. (This list of media is probably not exhaustive.)

Notice that I am not confining 'creativity' to the areas of life we usually associate with it such as painting, writing fiction, composing music and so on. Human creativity can manifest in any area of life and indeed *every aspect* of the cultural world we live in is a result of it. For example: someone

designed this house. Someone made this desk. Someone designed this font. And indeed, creativity extends even more deeply into life: in our relationships with others, in our presentation of ourselves, in the organisation of our time, we are engaged in ongoing creation.

So what is crucial about 'creativity' is not the medium or the message, but the element of newness. We might, for instance, comment that such and such a pop band is 'not very creative' because it has merely emulated the Beatles. We would be more likely to praise the band's creativity had they *digested* the achievement of the Beatles and used it as a launch-pad for something fresh and new. We wouldn't insist on total innovation to be persuaded to regard our band as 'creative', but some element of newness is essential if we are not to grumble about 'derivative fudges', rip-offs' and 'tired old formulas'.

For human beings, then, creativity does not happen *ex nihilo*: that is God's prerogative. The givens of language, culture, tradition, already existent forms and inspiring particulars are certain to be present in any creative activity.

How then does something new come into being when a human being is being creative? It's probably easier to answer this question by looking at what obstructs the emergence of the fresh and the new. If the artist's thought and feeling are rigidly confined to fixed, repetitive patterns then all that can emerge from them will be an expression of that rigidity. Nothing new will be possible. The patterns will simply reassert themselves again and again. By the same token, if the artist's thought and feeling is *fluid* and *unconstrained*, each expression produced by it will be fresh and new.

To sum this up in a simple formulation: *creativity flows out of a 'fluidity of being' present in a human being.*

Fixed patterns of thought and feeling are of course an essential part of the pragmatic aspects of being human. For example, having been taught a language and being able to use it are indispensable to me, and society at large requires this of the majority of its members in order to function at all. But as Patanjali notes early on in the Yoga Sutra, fixed patterns of thought and feeling can cause us to be disconnected from life and its delights and seriously blur our vision. They are thus at the root of much suffering. In short, our conditioning is something that is both necessary *and* inimical to our flourishing.

The antidote, as it were, is a certain orientation towards *the silence* that makes possible the sound of our thoughts and feelings.

#### SILENCE, MEDITATION, FREEDOM FROM THE FIXED

In formal meditation we allow the silence which is the ground of our being to come to the foreground of our consciousness. This of necessity means relinquishing our attachment to our fixed patterns of thought and feeling, at least temporarily. In silence we are not what we believe ourselves to be: we are too quiet to believe anything!

This in turn means that in relinquishing our rigidities, we allow a fluidity to come to our being. In this way silence and fluidity of being are intimately connected. Notice that this is *a letting be of what already is*. It is not a cultivation which would still be stuck in the sphere of fixed patterns of thought and feeling. Silence is already present. Just as writing needs a blank page to carry it, the activity of our consciousness needs silence to hold it. Similarly, fluidity of being is already present in that life is ever moving, in that, as Heraclitus would have it, 'You cannot step in the same river twice.'

So this allowing of silence to emerge is also an allowing the actual fluidity of life to become apparent and be recognised and embraced. Then everything is fresh and bright, even as we utilise the fixed patterns of our conditioning in practical ways. Instead of circling in stale circles of the old, our consciousness encounters *the creativity of things* as each moment emerges *new* from the one before. This consciousness only has to express itself to be creative since it is directly participating in the creativity of things.

In short: both creativity and meditation expose the fluidity of being which is our actuality as human beings embedded in the processes of life and the world. Meditation engenders intense creativity which scarcely belongs to the meditator. And creativity at its best is meditative.

#### CREATIVE PROCESSES

You will know this if you have ever been engrossed in improvising some music or making a drawing. You are entirely present and attentive. Yet you are not busy within the activity. Rather, everything is unfolding as it should and as it must. The mind and emotions are fluid and the whole process goes with the grain of the materials being used and indeed with the grain of things. This is

marvellous and the reason why art-practice can be so compulsive!

If your meditation has dropped you into that place of fluidity, you will find this creativity active within your whole life.

#### THE HUMAN BEING AND APPARENT OBSTACLES TO CREATIVITY

A human being is in fact entirely fluid. It is not too fanciful to say that a human consciousness is a temporary and shifting locus made up of an intersection of a whole host of event-chains. This dynamism however can escape us, even though it is abundantly clear and obvious, and we can and often do harbour a notion of ourselves as fixed 'things'. We might even seek out a fixity in the name of some 'spiritual quest'. Of all the fixed patterns of thought and feeling, this one is probably primordial. At the very least at the root of many of the others and many of our sufferings.

Believing ourselves to be fixed things hides the flow that we *are* from us. Consequently, the fluidity of being that enables our creativity is inhibited.

Meditation brings us face to face with our *flowing* actuality and in this way has the effect of automatically making us realise our creativity!