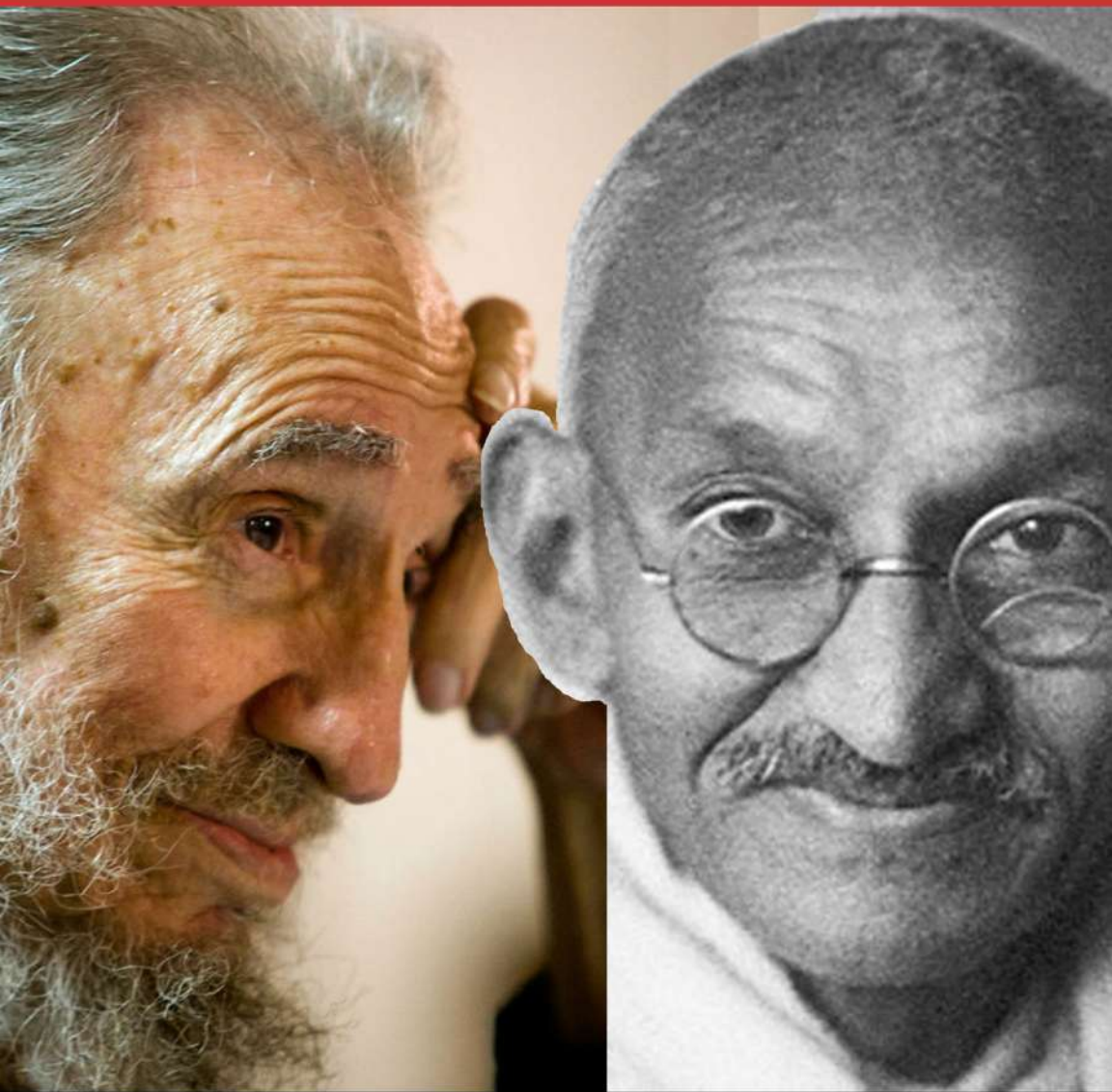


Yoga Sutras of **FIDEL CASTRO**



JOHN CURL
with a new Introduction

पातञ्जलयोगसूत्राणि



YOGA SUTRAS
OF
FIDEL CASTRO

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FIDEL CASTRO**

John Curl

Second edition.

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Yoga Sutras of Fidel Castro

by John Curl

“Yogis do things with the body which are beyond our imagination. There they are, before our eyes, through images arriving instantaneously from vast distances, through Voyage to the Unknown.”

Fidel Castro, June 19, 2012

INTRODUCTION

Karma Yoga and Socialist Revolution

When I first published my little book *Yoga Sutras of Fidel Castro*, I offered it without explanation. Although the work has a complex surface, it is the nature of aphorisms that they often require the reader to mull them over. However, a number of friends were simply baffled by it, and insisted that the book needed some explanation to make it accessible. So I told them that I wrote it by channeling two consciousnesses at the same time, the first being Patañjali, author of the original *Yoga Sutras*, the foundational text of Raja Yoga, written around the year 400, and the other was Fidel Castro, embodying the voice of socialist revolution.

The project was inspired by Fidel's entry in his blog *Reflexiones* on June 19, 2012, in the newspaper *Granma*:

“Yogis do things with the human body which escape our imagination. There they are, before our eyes, through images that arrive instantaneously from vast distances, through Voyage to the Unknown.”

“Los Yogas hacen cosas con el cuerpo humano que escapan a nuestra imaginación. Están allí, ante nuestros ojos, a través de imágenes que llegan instantáneamente desde enormes distancias, a través de Pasaje a lo Desconocido.”¹

This brief observation went viral in the media, partly because it

seemed incongruous coming from one of the world's most prominent living Marxists, one of the greatest revolutionaries of the 20th century. It was also noteworthy because he used only 35 words to express his thought, while he is notorious for the extreme length of his speeches, his 1960 address to the United Nations General Assembly still holding the record for that body at 4 hours 16 minutes, and his longest speech on record clocking in at 7 hours 10 minutes in 1986.

What was Fidel saying in the blog? A close examination of the words reveal that they are not as simple as they might appear at first glance. They have a mysterious and evocative ring to them. They resonate in one's mind like an aphorism or a mantra.

Had Fidel never seen yoga practiced before? A simple internet search shows that Cubans have practiced yoga since the 1950s. The Cuban Yoga Association today purports to have trained some 12,000 students, teaching yoga at the community level, with local branches in eight Cuban provinces in 2007, and twenty-five instructors. Could Fidel have been unaware of that? Besides, being a lifelong student of social revolution, Fidel unquestionably must have studied the Indian independence movement, and the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi, who was arguably the greatest yogi of the 20th century.

When Fidel writes, "Yogis do things with the human body which escape our imagination," what could he mean? Is he referring simply to Hatha yoga *asanas*? Some of the postures certainly require a limber body, but nothing that extreme. Cuba has excellent Olympic gymnasts, Fidel has surely seen circus contortionists, and from all other indications he has a healthy imagination.

A little research revealed to me that *Pasaje a lo Desconocido* was a regular show on Cuban television. I hope this episode is still out there somewhere on video tape, and I would love to see it. But what does Fidel mean by "images that arrive instantaneously from vast distances." That doesn't appear to refer to a show broadcast from a Havana studio across town.

So what might the program have included beyond Hatha yoga exercises? Certainly any show about yoga should have included

meditation, consciousness, the mind-body connectedness which is at the core of the science. So contemplate that brief phrase again, “Yogis do things with the human body which escape our imagination,” and soak in all its deeply condensed meanings.

On the surface yoga and socialist revolution might sound contradictory. One focuses on the individual, the other on the social order. One turns inward, the other outward. One appears to focus on peace, the other on struggle.

Yet yoga is not only about stretching, exercise, relaxation, therapy, alternative medicine, meditation. And socialist revolution is not only about social justice, redistribution of wealth, workers’ power, social property, overthrowing tyranny, restrictions on economic license.

Both practice the transformation of individuals, society, and the world. Both analyze the causes of human suffering and alienation. Both seek to remove those causes by raising and transforming consciousness. Both are based on the understanding of the deep interconnectedness of all people and things. Both offer the insight that in reality we are not just separate individuals, but together form a larger organism in which the welfare of one is dependent on the welfare of all. Although yoga may appear to retreat from the world, that is really just a strategy at certain points along the path. Ultimately yoga, like socialist revolution, engages the world, through action, practice and *praxis*. Both search for peace through struggle.

Yoga and socialist revolution are actually quite similar: both are sciences based on observation, study, analysis, repeatable experiments, action, and both have the same ultimate goal: the liberation of humanity.

* * *

Numerous legends surround Patañjali’s life, but almost no hard evidence of the real person exists beyond his writings. He probably lived in south-eastern India around the year 400 AD. Besides the *Yoga Sutras*, most modern scholars believe that he also wrote the commentary on the *Sutras* known as the *Yoga-Bhashya*, although it is traditionally attributed to Vyasa, author of the *Mahabharata*, who

actually lived about 800 years earlier.

One tradition puts Patañjali's birthplace in Sri Lanka at the site of Koneswaram temple. Another tradition holds that he learned yoga from the legendary Guru Nandhi Deva, who is considered a "gatekeeper" of Shiva, and traditionally depicted as a bull. Patañjali's tomb (actually his *jeeva samadhi*) is claimed by Tirupattur Brahmapureswarar temple in the southeast Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Many legends about Patañjali substitute for his biography, but these only serve to mystify the life of a very practical realist, so repeating them here would distract from my purpose.

Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras* are divided into four *padas* (sections or books), with 196 sutras or aphorisms in all. The first section, Samadhi Pada, Section I (51 sutras) describes yoga as the technique for reaching *samādhi*, the state which the yogi enters into by descending into the mind, where she/he experiences reality as it is, is absorbed into the oneness of the universe, and achieves independence from bondage. It is with the understandings realizable in this state that the Karma yogi returns to work in this world. Samadhi Pada encapsulates the key elements of the consciousness aspects of Patañjali's *Yoga Sutras*. For the purposes of *Yoga Sutras of Fidel Castro* I used only this first section as the basis for my text, absorbing the content of the other sections into it.

The other sections are Sadhana Pada (55 sutras), Vibhuti Pada (56 sutras), and Kaivalya Pada (34 sutras).

Sadhana Pada, Section II, "the book of practice," describes Karma Yoga, the yoga of action and service to humanity without attachment to the fruits or results, which are part of Raja Yoga, the eight limbs that lead to enlightenment. Vibhuti Pada, Section III, "the book of power," describes the powers that can be acquired through yoga, and warns that they can distract from the path of liberation. Kaivalya Pada, Section IV, "the book of independence," describes in detail the process of emancipation through shedding all bondage of the past, and achieving liberation through a purified consciousness.

Sadhana Pada, Section II, "the book of practice," describes how the Karma yogi needs to act in this world, and do service. This

is the yoga of Mahatma Gandhi and of social revolution. The Karma yogi, the enlightened revolutionary, returns from her/his descent into the mind, reenters this world of change and trouble, and applies in this world the understandings learned through *samādhī*. In sutra II:35 Patañjali explains the effective power of non-violence: “When one is fully based in non-violence, others around him let go of their anger.”²

Patañjali writes (sutra II:30) “Nonharming (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), nonstealing (*asteya*), control of sensual desires (*brahmacharya*), and nonpossession (*aparigraha*) are the five disciplines (*yamas*).”

These are the exact same five disciplines enumerated by Gandhi for his *satyagrahi* followers. Gandhi adds control of the palate (*asmada*) as a sixth discipline separate from control of the other sensual appetites (*brahmacharya*), to give it more emphasis. To be a follower of Gandhi and his truth-force (*satyagraha*), a *satyagrahi* had to take these same “principle vows” or disciplines (*yamas*): truthfulness, nonharming, control of sensual desires, control of the palate, nonstealing, nonpossession. Gandhi eventually expanded these into 11 disciplines, adding: bread-labor (*sharirshrama*), fearlessness (*sarvatra bhayavarjana*), equal respect for all religions (*sarva dharma samantva*), use of locally made goods (*swadeshi*), and freedom from untouchability (*sparsbbhavana*).

* * *

Although I have studied a number of languages, I do not know Sanskrit, and I studied Patañjali’s *Yoga Sutras* by comparing many translations.

Each translator of course achieves somewhat different results. The original is very compact, and each syllable has more than one connotation. On top of that, each translator understands the whole somewhat differently, and massages the words to bring those understandings to the surface.

For example, here are fifteen different translations of Patañjali’s 2nd sutra, his definition of yoga. [I include the original Sanskrit here, and before each sutra in this book.]

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २ ॥

yogab citta-vrtti-nirodhab

yogab = yoking; union

citta = consciousness

vrtti = patterning, turnings, movements

nirodhab = stilling, cessation, restriction

15 Translations of Sutra I.2

Yoga is to still the patterning of consciousness.

Yoga is the restraint of mental modifications.

Yoga is the restraint of the modifications of the mind.

Yoga is the restraint of fluctuations of the mind.

The restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff is *Yoga*.

Union is restraining the thought-streams natural to the mind.

Yoga is the control of thought-waves in the mind.

Union, spiritual consciousness, is gained through control of the versatile psychic nature.

Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness.

Concentration, or *Yoga*, is the hindering of the modifications of the thinking principle.

Yoga is the inhibition of the modifications of the mind.

Yoga is the suppression of the modifications of the mind.

Yoga is the suppression of the functions of internal organ.

Yoga is the cessation of movements in the consciousness.

Yoga is the cessation of mind.

* * *

What has this got to do with socialist revolution? First, in order to change the world in a constructive way, we need to understand it, and to understand it we need to see it as it is, which means with a clear mind. *Yoga* clears the mind. Second, the higher levels of *yoga*

all pass through Karma yoga, the yoga of action in this world, practice or *praxis*, to help shape the world to reflect its own cleared mind, cleared of violence, greed, and all the negative baggage of the past. This is the yoga of the struggle for a better world. Since the world runs through economics, this is also the struggle for socialism, which in a larger sense simply means sharing this planet in equitable, sustainable ways.

We have to be clear about this: a more cooperative, sharing world—a more socialist world—will never be achieved without an elevation of our common consciousness. We do not need to call it socialism, if that word has been too abused for your taste. For me, almost all words have been so abused that I hesitate to say anything at all. Call it anything you want to call it. After all, these are just words.

* * *

Mahatma Gandhi was my mother's greatest hero, or perhaps her second greatest hero, after only FDR.

At an early age, due in part to Mom's enthusiasm, I was inspired by Gandhi, though I didn't really know much about him at that time. They seemed to play it in the news that he was defeating the mighty British Empire by fasting. There was a little more to it of course, but his quixotic audacity seized the imagination of even a seven-year-old, which I was at the time. My grandpa Sammo used to fast occasionally, but nobody ever cared or even noticed.

When I was around twenty read Gandhi's *My Experiments With Truth*,³ and it left a deep impression. I learned that truth was both inward and outward, and if one persisted honestly and earnestly exploring in both directions, one might eventually arrive at some degree of understanding. I also relearned that one task we have all been given in life is to create a just world, if somehow we could find the audacity to create it. I read other materials related to Gandhi, and many of the classics of Eastern spirituality that were available at that time. I felt naturally very close to many of the understandings that these books talk about.

Gandhi always carried a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* with him. It was his inspiration and guide, and he referred to the *Gita* as his

“spiritual dictionary” and “The Gospel of Selfless Action.” The *Gita* is another key to understanding Gandhi and his yoga of action. Gandhi wrote a commentary on the *Gita* in Gujarati, his native language, published in English translation as *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*.⁴

The *Gita* is set into the narrative of a larger epic poem, the *Mahabharata*, about a civil war over dynastic succession to a throne in an ancient kingdom, between two rival groups of cousins, the Pandavas and Kauravas. Pandeva prince Arjuna, in his war chariot, feels immobilized, and does not want to fight his relatives. Gandhi, in his commentary on the *Gita*, interprets the battle as “an allegory in which the battlefield is the soul and Arjuna, man’s higher impulses struggling against evil.” Arjuna commences a dialog with his charioteer and guide, who happens to be the deity Krishna. This dialog is the *Gita*. Krishna advises Arjuna to follow the path of Karma yoga, to do his duty in this world as a warrior, to act without attachment to the results or fruits of his actions, to act through “inaction in action and action in inaction,” and thus attain liberation.

In his introduction, Gandhi wrote, “It has been my endeavor, as also that of some companions, to reduce to practice the teaching of the *Gita* as I have understood it. The *Gita* has become for us a spiritual reference book... The accompanying rendering contains the meaning of the *Gita* message which this little band is trying to enforce in its daily conduct... At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavor to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of forty years... The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization... That matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of action. This is the centre round which the *Gita* is woven... But after forty years’ unremitting endeavor fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gita* in my own life, I have in all humility felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) in every shape and form”⁵

* * *

The Cuban Revolution was a great inspiration to many of my generation, at least among my circle of friends. I was in my first year

attending New York City College (CCNY), studying comparative literature, when Castro's guerrilla army took Havana in January, 1959 and began setting up a revolutionary socialist society. At that time CCNY had a minimal tuition, and numerous people who went there were from working class backgrounds.

I and my friends understood even then that the Cuban Revolution's greatest power lay in its being an example for numerous other nations under the thumb of imperialism and suffering from hopeless poverty, corruption, oligarchy. So the great outcry among friends of the Revolution was to try to head off intervention, and the slogan was "Hands Off Cuba." I won't go into detail about the many accomplishments of the early Cuban Revolution, but in a short time they socialized large plantations and industrial companies, confiscated the holdings of foreign (mostly US) corporations, greatly improved medicine, housing, education, unemployment, equality for people of color, etc etc.

One of the aspects that most excited us was their concept of the "new man and woman." Of course they were not going to change human nature. But they recognized that human nature has great potential for both creation and destruction, and they were trying to create a situation which would bring out the best in it.

Fidel stressed that "the great task of the revolution is essentially the task of forming the new man... the man of truly socialist consciousness, the man of truly communist consciousness."⁶

"Our education, within our socialist revolution, must become a vanguard institution, because its tasks, its illustrious task, its extremely important task, will be precisely that of molding the citizen, preparing the citizen, training the citizen to adapt mentally and physically to live in this world--a world different from the one we have known up to now. This is the revolution. This is the great task of the revolution."⁷

Che Guevara too spoke on numerous occasions about consciousness and the "new man and woman."

"In moments of great peril it is easy to muster a powerful response to moral stimuli; but for them to retain

their effect requires the development of a consciousness in which there is a new priority of values. Society as a whole must be converted into a gigantic school... Socialism cannot exist without a change in consciousness resulting in a new fraternal attitude toward humanity, both at an individual level, within the societies where socialism is being built or has been built, and on a world scale, with regard to all peoples suffering from imperialist oppression.... The ultimate and most important revolutionary aspiration: to see human beings liberated from their alienation... The individual under socialism, despite apparent standardization, is more complete.... The individual will reach total consciousness as a social being, which is equivalent to the full realization as a human creature, once the chains of alienation are broken. This will be translated concretely into the re-conquering of one's true nature through liberated labor, and the expression of one's own human condition through culture and art.”⁸

Che reiterated in many ways that the key to revolution was consciousness and struggle. “Dream and you will be free in spirit, fight and you will be free in life” “Let the world change you and you can change the world” “Be realistic, demand the impossible!” “I am not a liberator. Liberators do not exist. The people liberate themselves.” “At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality.”

After Che was murdered, Fidel held him up as a model of the “new man.”

“[T]his revolution has already begun to reap the fruit—the most lasting and most valuable fruit, which is translated into the people's awareness, in the consciousness of our youth—because the revolution, the great task of the revolution is essentially the task of training the new man... spoken of by El Che, the man of truly revolutionary conscience, of truly socialist conscience, and of truly communist conscience.

“When our youth are capable of meditating so deeply, when our youth are capable of expressing themselves about all these problems, are capable of contemplating and conceiving so deeply, and when they reach such conclusions... when they express their youthful awareness of wanting to live in a communist society that is when we can truly say, can be completely sure that the liberation effort... that this revolutionary process can never be stopped by anything or anyone, for its strength lies... basically in the degree it has penetrated the consciousness, in the very high degree it has become part of the people’s consciousness. When a cause, an idea, becomes part of the consciousness of a people, there is no force in the world capable of destroying it!...

“The paths leading to a superior society are very difficult paths. A communist society signifies that man has attained the highest degree of social consciousness. A communist society signifies that a human being has been capable of attaining a level of understanding and fraternity which man has only occasionally attained in the intimate bosom of his family. To live in a communist society is truly to live in a society of brothers...”⁹

Castro declared Cuba a socialist state on May 1, 1961 and proclaimed himself a Marxist-Leninist in a televised speech on December 2, 1961. Cuba aligned itself with what was considered in the Cold War era to be the Socialist Camp. But the Cuban revolutionaries were not the proletariat that Marx conceived of as taking power and issuing in socialism in industrialized Europe, but actually a small group of guerrillas who had seized power in an underdeveloped island. Yet what did Marxist theory matter? The purpose of revolution was to create a just society, and revolutionaries had to improvise.

Later in retrospect, Castro would say, “[O]ne of our greatest mistakes at the beginning of, and often during, the Revolution was believing that someone knew how to build socialism.”¹⁰

Although a revolutionary warrior, Castro was never enamored with war. “Warfare is a means and not an end. Warfare is a tool of

revolutionaries. The important thing is the revolution! The important thing is the revolutionary cause, revolutionary ideas, revolutionary objectives, revolutionary sentiments, revolutionary virtues!”¹¹ He further developed that line of thought in the following years: “Ideas do not need weapons, to the extent that they can convince the great masses.”¹²

During Che’s 1959 official visit to India, where he met with Prime Minister Nehru, in an interview with a reporter he compared Gandhi’s nonviolent revolution with the Cuban experience: “You have Gandhi and an old philosophical heritage; in our Latin America we have neither. That is why our mindset has developed differently.” He went on:

“I am a socialist who believes in equality and freedom from the exploiting countries. I have seen hunger, so much suffering, stark poverty, sickness and unemployment right from my very young days in America. It is happening in Cuba, Vietnam and Africa – the struggle for freedom starts from the hunger of the people. There are useful lessons in the Marxist-Leninist theory. The practical revolutionary initiates his own struggle, simply fulfilling laws foreseen by Marx. In India, Gandhiji’s teachings had its own merit which finally brought freedom.”¹³

So how can one reconcile Fidel and Che’s guerrilla warfare with Gandhi’s *satyagraha* nonviolent resistance? Both are *praxis*. Fidel has followed his path and become an elder statesman of socialist consciousness. As William Blake wrote, “If the fool would persist in his folly, he would become wise.”

* * *

And what did Marx himself have to say about the “new man and new woman” (although he never used that term) and “socialist (or communist) consciousness”?

Marx spoke about consciousness in a very different context. No group with a socialistic program had ever achieved political power, at least until the brief Paris Commune of 1871. Marx and Marxism took the long term view, and insisted on developing social revolution into what they considered a science. In contrast, there

were many “utopian” socialists in his time, each with a somewhat different pre-digested system, and each tried to convince the world to simply adopt and institute his personal vision of socialism. In 1845-1846, Marx saw the process differently.

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of man on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.¹⁴

Marx understood that there really could not be any one pre-digested socialist system issuing from the mind of a genius. He realized that society evolves, that the struggle to create a revolutionary socialist society would shape what it actually looked like. He insisted that class consciousness came before socialist consciousness. Class consciousness is the awareness of the oppression and the need for struggle against it, while socialist consciousness—cooperative, egalitarian, democratic—was at a higher level, an emancipated consciousness that could appear only as the result of successful struggle in the real world, such as he later found in the 1871 Paris Commune. While ultimately socialism or communism would be based on peace, cooperation, and harmony, the road to it was fraught with struggle.

* * *

Gandhi practiced a combination of yogas, based on staying in touch with his inner direction. He was gifted with a high level of natural awareness, which he developed through intellectual and scholarly studies, before he ever began studying with yoga teachers. He never had only one guru. He was basically self-reliant, turning inward and outward to find his teachers, within himself and through his “experiments with truth” in the world. Throughout his entire life,

he never stopped studying and searching, never became self-satisfied, but remained a humble seeker, tirelessly struggling for ever deeper and higher realizations, through practice, internally and externally, in his mind, body, and in the world. The yoga he self-discovered, with guidance from many teachers, taught him that he and the world were inseparable. Thus he played out his life fully as an individual and as the world soul that he was. As Patañjali says in sutra II.47, “the body and the infinite universe are indivisible.”

Gandhi’s physical yoga consisted of only some simple asanas and simple pranayama. Only two asanas are clearly documented that he practiced: shavasana (corpse) and sarvangasana (shoulder stand), and apparently he only practiced them occasionally.

Gandhi’s open attitude is revealed by Paramhansa Yogananda’s pilgrimage to Gandhi’s ashram Maganvadi, in August 1935, as he recounts in his book *Autobiography of a Yogi*:

“On the previous night Gandhi had expressed a wish to receive the *Kriya Yoga* of Lahiri Mahasaya. I was touched by the Mahatma’s open-mindedness and spirit of inquiry. He is childlike in his divine quest, revealing that pure receptivity which Jesus praised in children, ‘. . . of such is the kingdom of heaven.’

“The hour for my promised instruction had arrived; several *satyagrahis* now entered the room. Mr. Desai, Dr. Pingale, and a few others who desired the *Kriya* technique.

“I first taught the little class the physical *Yogoda* exercises. The body is visualized as divided into twenty parts; the will directs energy in turn to each section. Soon everyone was vibrating before me like a human motor. It was easy to observe the rippling effect on Gandhi’s twenty body parts, at all times completely exposed to view! Though very thin, he is not unpleasingly so; the skin of his body is smooth and unwrinkled.

“Later I initiated the group into the liberating technique of *Kriya Yoga*.”⁵

Gandhi was a socialist. He was not a state socialist. The socialism that he promoted was a self-sufficient village socialism

based on sharing, cooperation, “trusteeship,” peasant agriculture, and simple handicrafts. Gandhi’s concept of “trusteeship” was a kind of cooperative fellowship, that in a self-sustaining community each person should be a “trustee” of the welfare of the others, based on managing collective economic resources and property for the benefit of all. A nonviolent and humanistic socialism. He rejected violence, class war, and materialism as motors of social change, and instead looked to the raising of spiritual consciousness as the vehicle to bring about socialistic economic changes while promoting social harmony. At the same time, he was an untiring activist, and organized and inspired uncounted tens of thousands to practice mass civil disobedience, using *satyagraha*, “truth-force,” taking nonviolent direct action in the movement that won independence for India.

The goals of yoga can be approached in a number of ways, and thus the science of yoga has many schools and variations, which can be practiced separately or in combination, each offering a path toward the common goal of liberation. Every sincere path leads the student to a higher level of health, living, and consciousness. These paths all feed into each other. The student who reaches the higher altitudes joins the path followed by Gandhi.

Gandhi primarily practiced Karma Yoga, the yoga of action, the discipline of acting dynamically in the world with awareness. Karma yogis realize that this world is both an extension of their mind-body, and it *is* their mind-body. At the higher levels the categories of individual and world no longer apply. This awareness can come naturally to a few individuals, but most people need to study in order to approach yogic awareness. Following Gandhi, study needs to be combined with *praxis*, the practical application of yogic ideas in the world, and learning from the results of these “experiments with truth.” The best methods of yogic action were developed by Gandhi in what he called *satyagraha*, “truth-force,” nonviolent activism.

The four most important yogas are Raja yoga (meditation), Karma yoga (discipline of action), Jnana yoga (knowledge through self-reflection), and Bhakti yoga (love, faith, prayer).

Besides being a Karma yogi, Gandhi was also a Jnana

(knowledge) yogi.

“The way to achieve truth is as simple as it is difficult. It may seem impossible to an arrogant person, and simple to an innocent child. A seeker of truth has to be more humble than dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but a seeker of truth should be so humble that even the dust could crush him. Then and only then would he get a glimpse of truth.”¹⁶

Yoga in the West is often practiced primarily as physical exercise for health, rather than as spiritual self-mastery. The most common yoga in the West, Hatha yoga, stresses the physical aspects, controlling and purifying energies through exercises to tune the body—one’s personal vehicle—to a higher level, to improve health, flexibility, balance, and strength. Through *asanas*, *pranayama*, and other exercises, Hatha stretches and loosens the rigidities in the body, leading to the refinement and flowing of energy, opening the body and mind for the beginning of consciousness expansion, without which no progress in this world can be made. Yet the main mission of Hatha yoga is to prepare the body and mind to receive higher and deeper purifications through contemplation and meditation. Yogi Swatmarama in his 15th century classic *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, one of the foundation texts of Hatha, warns those who stop at Hatha yoga and go no further: “Those who are ignorant of the Raja Yoga and practice only the Hatha Yoga, will, in my opinion, waste their energy fruitlessly... All the methods of Hatha are meant for gaining success in the Raja Yoga.”¹⁷

Yoga is a body of techniques, methods toward a goal. And it is also a process, a way of living. As the *Gita* teaches, only by eschewing goals can we approach them. A number of pitfalls befell twentieth century socialist revolutionaries who achieved political power: among these were creating a bureaucracy that became a new ruling class; believing that industrialization would lead to socialism; unawareness of and disrespect for the environment; substituting a party for the people; trying to raise consciousness by force; careerism of leaders, etc, etc. So one basic admonition or caveat that the socialist revolutionary—particularly the revolutionary who consciously follows the path of Karma yoga—needs to be aware of is not to become so immersed in the struggle that you lose focus on

the goal. Class consciousness and class struggles are not ends but tools for their own transcendence. The goal is not to punish individuals for their crimes against society, but to move society beyond the unjust and inequitable class system as we know it. Sometimes getting lost in the struggle can turn the revolutionary into what she/he is fighting against.

Yoga Sutras of Fidel Castro is meant to be a road map for the social revolutionary seeking the consciousness necessary for success, in the same way that Patañjali's original *Yoga Sutras* is a map to liberation. Of course, a revolutionary who has already achieved the required consciousness does not need any map external to his or her own body and mind.

The goal of Karma yoga is a goalless goal. The world is eternally in process, and you might say that it *is process* itself. The same is true of socialist revolution. By the very nature of things, the social revolution is never complete. Social justice can be approached at moments, but never completely achieved. A new generation is always in the process of being born, and even at this moment the world is changing.

* * *

I personally came to the project of *Yoga Sutras of Fidel Castro* with some experience in both yoga and working for social justice. Both have been areas of my study and practice since fairly early in life.

In my early twenties I took up Hatha yoga, and practiced it persistently. I thought of myself as a seeker of truth, and in some ways I was. But when the practice began to draw so much of my time and energy that I had little left over to do anything else, I backed off. My instincts told me that I also had other paths to follow, so I relegated Hatha yoga exercises to no more than an hour on most days, which I followed loosely as my inner spirit directed me. I have continued stretching and other exercises ever since.

I have also spent much of my life working for social justice. Beyond my writing, I've done political, cultural, and social work over many years, involving a number of organizations. Some could be broadly

categorized as cultural groups, others as grassroots/community organizations, and others as collective/cooperative.

I mention them here only to give you some idea of my qualifications for writing this work. In general chronological order, these are social justice groups I have worked with for a significant length of time:

Cultural: Toward Revolutionary Art (magazine), Cloud House (poetry center), Poetry for the People (organizing/publishing), PEN Oakland, Revolutionary Poets Brigade.

Grassroots/Community: MAARS (Merchants, Artists, Artisans, and Residents), Berkeley Citizens Action, Sawtooth Building Tenants Association, Resistance 500, Indigenous Peoples Day Committee, Grupo Maya Kusamej Junan, West Berkeley Artisans and Industrial Companies (WEBAIC).

Collective/Cooperative: Drop City, Bay Warehouse Collective, The InterCollective, Heartwood Cooperative Woodshop, Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives (NoBAWC)

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The surface of this world has seen vast changes since the time of Gandhi and since the Cuban guerrillas entered Havana, but in essence the world has not changed much. On the positive side, signs that a broader consciousness is emerging include the environmental movement, the acceptance of gay marriage, and the fact that both the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis support humanistic socialism and condemn capitalism.

But in contrast is the privatization of many facets of the world that had long been socialized, the global empowerment of transnational corporations, the seemingly endless imperialist wars. So despite some gains, overall the power to shape the world is even more tightly in the hands of corporate oligarchies and warlords than ever before.

All capitalism's promises of freedom and democracy have proved hollow and false. Capitalism is, and has always been, a system for channeling wealth to a small elite. Capitalism has never held the goals of democracy, social equity, or the general welfare.

Today transnational corporate oligarchies marginalize, control, and impoverish most of humanity. The forces of greed, power, and domination rule. They commit crimes against life and nature daily with increasing impunity. The system is self-perpetuating. The planet is hurtling toward environmental destruction. Humanity has been pushed into a corner.

Very deep changes are needed, but we cannot make those deep changes through the existing electoral system. We can change administrations through elections, but we cannot change this regime through the electoral system. With very few exceptions, only those candidates willing to play the game are permitted anywhere near the reins of power. Loose cannons are weeded out as soon as they are discovered. In order to defuse tensions, the system puts forth candidates promising changes they can't actually deliver, and if some are actually elected to high positions, the system clamps down, with the final result being disillusionment with any leader. Even when sincere people are elected, today's public officials have only a very narrow range of options; real power has been transferred from electoral offices to the private financial system. This applies to even the president of the USA. Meaningful change on a significant scale can only be won by regime change, by transforming the entire system.

This is both a struggle of consciousness and a struggle for real power. One basis of this system—of this regime—is low consciousness, both among the population and among the leaders. The only way low consciousness can be overthrown is by an elevation of consciousness. Another basis of this regime is sheer force. Gandhi and Fidel each offer different ways to overthrow regime force. Which one might prove to be the fulcrum for overthrowing the global corporate power, only tomorrow's history may reveal.

We all come into this world from a place where we understand the oneness of life, spirit, consciousness. However, human nature has problematic sides, and being raised in a society that stresses separateness, individuality and competition, results in most of us losing that perspective and understanding at an early age. That is why we need to search deep inside ourselves and regain the visions

and understandings we once had and need again.

The nature of this world is perpetual transition, continuous change. Socialist revolution is based on change, and socialist revolutionaries are physicians of those social transitions. For the world to survive and be a place where our seventh generation grandchildren can thrive, real power in the real world needs to be defeated, to change hands, and to achieve that we all must become leaders, enlightened leaders. With the inspiration of visionaries like Gandhiji and Fidel, yogic socialist thought and practice can be a guiding light for this era. We can all follow the path of socialist enlightenment, and become yogic revolutionaries.

John Curl

NOTES

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पातञ्जलयोगसूत्राणि



अथ योगानुशासनम्

1.

This is the yoga of socialism.

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः

2.

Socialist yoga harmonizes
the thoughts of
the people
and the bodily
forms they take.

तदा द्रष्टुः स्वरूपेऽवस्थानम्

3.

Then humanity rests
in its true
socialist nature,
beyond struggle.

वृत्तिसारूप्यमितरत्र

4.

At other times,
the revolutionary remains
identified with
the thought forms
of struggle.

वृत्तयः पञ्चतय्यः क्लिष्टैक्लिष्टाः

5.

There are five forms
of thought,
some distressful,
others benevolent
to the revolutionary
struggling
for socialism
and
against capitalism.

प्रमाणविषयविकल्पनिद्रास्मृतयः

6.

These forms are:
correct perception,
misconception,
verbal delusion,
sleep,
and memory.

प्रत्यक्षानुमानागमाः प्रमाणानि

7.

Correct knowledge arrives
from direct perception,
analysis, and study
of the natural world,
humanity, and society.

विपर्ययो मिथ्याज्ञानमतद्रूपप्रतिष्ठम्

8.

Misconception is
false knowledge not
based in natural
or social reality.

शब्दज्ञानानुपाती वस्तुशून्यो विकल्पः

9.

Verbal delusion
arises from words
that do not reflect
reality.

अभावप्रत्ययालम्बना वृत्तिर्निद्रा

10.

Sleep rests only
on mind states, absent
of all material
realities beyond
the cosmic energy ocean.

अनुभूतविषयासंप्रमोषः स्मृतिः

11.

Memory means
not letting go
of
perceived history.

अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः

12.

All these forms
of thought
can be stilled
and channeled into
revolutionary practice
by nonattachment.

तत्र स्थितौ यत्नोऽभ्यासः

13.

Practice is
the continuous struggle
to move
the collective mind
toward its balanced state.

स तु दीर्घकालनैरन्तर्यसत्कारा-
सेवितो दृढभूमिः

14.

Revolutionary practice
becomes firmly grounded
by long effort
and great love
for the people.

दृष्टानुश्रविकविषयवितृष्णस्य
वशीकारसंज्ञा वैराग्यम्

15.

Freedom and self-mastery
arise from
non-attachment
to the capitalist world
of commodified
thoughts and senses.

तत्परं पुरुषख्यातेर्गुणवैतृष्ण्यम्

16.

The highest non-attachment
realizes cessation
of desire to possess
the commodified world,
and pure awareness
arrives through knowledge
that the individual self
is actually
the world soul.

वितर्कविचारानन्दास्मितारूपा-
नुगमात्संप्रज्ञातः

17.

Socialist meditation
leading to correct
perception passes through
four stages:
examination,
distinction,
peaceful joy,
a new sense of self.

विरामप्रत्ययाभ्यासपूर्वः संस्कारशेषोऽन्यः

18.

It can be attained
by the practice of
cessation of thought
about all
commodified objects,
leaving the mind-stuff
in retention of only
unmanifested perceptions.

भवप्रत्ययो विदेहप्रकृतिलयानाम्

19.

When socialist meditation
is practiced without
complete non-attachment,
the revolutionary may reach
a state where the energies
are merged
with the commodified world
instead of with
the natural world.

श्रद्धावीर्यस्मृतिसमाधिप्रज्ञा-
पूर्वक इतरेषाम्

20.

To some,
socialist meditation
comes through study,
energy,
mindfulness,
concentration, and
distinction of
what is real from
what is unreal.

तीव्रसंवेगानामासन्नः

21.

Success, or
class consciousness
and its transcendence,
can come
quickly to those
wholehearted
and focused.

मृदुमध्याधिमात्रत्वात्ततोऽपि विशेषः

22.

But success differs
according to
the means adopted:
temperate,
moderate,
or intense.

ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा

23.

Success can also be
achieved by immersion
into the awareness
of the socialist visionaries.

क्लेशकर्मविपाकाशयैरपरामृष्टः
पुरुषविशेष ईश्वरः

24.

These visionary spirits
are undaunted
by ignorance,
false actions,
the illusory fruits of work,
or desires.

तत्र निरतिशयं सर्वज्ञबीजम्

25.

In them,
knowledge is vast
and at the same time
a seed.

पूर्वेषामपि गुरुः कालेनानवच्छेदात्

26.

They are both
modern and ancient,
because they are
not limited
by time.

तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः

27.

The word
that expresses
these visionaries,
is
solidarity.

तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्

28.

These concepts must
be meditated upon
repeatedly to grasp
their meaning.

ततः प्रत्यक्चेतनाधिगमोऽप्य-
न्तरायाभावश्च

29.

From that is gained
knowledge of
the inner spirit and
the destruction
of obstacles.

व्याधिस्त्यानसंशयप्रमादालस्याविरतिभ्रान्तिदर्शनालब्धभूमिकत्वानवस्थितत्वानि
चित्तविक्षेपास्तेऽन्तरायाः

30.

Sickness, apathy, doubt,
lack of enthusiasm,
lethargy,
clinging to low sensuality,
false perception,
failure of concentration, and
instability, are all
distracting obstacles thrown up
by the capitalist system.

दुःखदौर्मनस्याङ्गमेजयत्वश्वास-
प्रश्वासा विक्षेपसहभुवः

31.

These capitalist distractions
are accompanied by
grief,
distress,
trembling, and
irregular breathing.

तत्प्रतिषेधार्थमेकतत्त्वाभ्यासः

32.

To remedy this,
concentrate on a
single truth.

प्रच्छेदनविधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य

33.

Camaraderie, compassion,
delight in goodness,
indifference toward revenge, and
equanimity toward all things,
can pacify the mind.

प्रच्छेदनविधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य

34.

The mind can also
be calmed by
stretching the body and
regulating
the cycle of breaths.

विषयवती वा प्रवृत्तिरुत्पन्ना
मनसः स्थितिनिबन्धनी

35.

Or by steadily
observing as
perceptions of history
materialize
and pass.

विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती

36.

Meditation on
the inner light of
the future,
beyond all sorrow,
also
brings this end.

वीतरागविषयं वा चित्तम्

37.

As does meditation
on the heart
of an illuminated soul
who has given up
all attachment to
commodified objects.

स्वप्ननिद्राज्ञानालम्बनं वा

38.

As does meditating
on insights
that come
in sleep
and dream.

यथाभिमतध्यानाद्वा

39.

As does meditation
on any form
or symbol that
appeals to one's deepest
intuition as
inherently good.

परमाणुपरममहत्त्वान्तोऽ-
स्य वशीकारः

40.

The revolutionary whose
mind is thus
meditating, becomes
unobstructed from
the infinitesimal level
to the infinite.

क्षीणवृत्तेरभिजातस्येव मणेर्य-
हीतृग्रहणग्राह्येषु तत्स्थतदञ्ज-
नता समापत्तिः

41.

One whose thoughts
have thus become
channeled into the inner self,
or into the collective mind
of the natural world,
achieves identity with
the object of meditation,
like a crystal reflecting
the color of a near object.

तत्र शब्दार्थज्ञानविकल्पैः संकीर्णा
सवितर्का समापत्तिः

42.

When the mind
achieves identity with
the object of meditation,
joined in words, meanings,
and the resulting knowledge,
this state is
“socialist consciousness
reflecting thought.”

स्मृतिपरिशुद्धौ स्वरूपशून्येवार्थ-
मात्रनिर्भासा निर्वितर्का

43.

When the revolutionary's
memory is purified,
or devoid of qualities,
expressing only the deeper
essence of the meditated object,
no longer joined
in words, apparent meanings,
or superficial knowledge,
this state is
“socialist consciousness
beyond thought.”

एतयैव सविचारा निर्विचारा च
सूक्ष्मविषया व्याख्याता

44.

Consciousness reflecting
thought and
consciousness beyond thought
are both
achievable when
the object meditated upon
is of a subtle
or higher nature.

सूक्ष्मविषयत्वं चालिङ्गपर्यवसानम्

45.

Meditation upon a subtle
object ends with
primordial matter,
the primal cause, and
expresses itself socially
in the people helping
each other to share and
preserve the natural world.

ता एव सबीजः समाधिः

46.

These are said
to be
“socialist meditations
bearing seed.”

निर्विचारवैशाखेऽध्यात्मप्रसादः

47.

When wisdom has been
reached through
meditation without reflections
or distinctions,
there is spiritual
clearness regarding
the nature
of the self
and society.

ऋतंभरा तत्र प्रज्ञा

48.

This knowledge is
called
"filled with
socialist truth."

श्रुतानुमानप्रज्ञाभ्यामन्यवि-
षया विशेषार्थत्वात्

49.

Knowledge that is
gained from study
and reason is knowledge
of objects and energies
of the natural world.

But socialist meditation
is of a much higher order,
penetrating where reason
and study cannot go.

तज्जः संस्कारोऽन्यसंस्का-
रप्रतिबन्धी

50.

Consciousness through
meditation bearing seed
wipes out all other
trains of thought, and
the revolutionary becomes
singularly focused
on the struggle against
capitalism and for
socialism both in
the collective mind
and in the natural world.

तस्यापि निरोधे सर्वनिरोधा-
न्निर्बीजः समाधिः

51.

Yet even this
consciousness can itself
be wiped out,
upon which one
enters into
“meditation beyond seed,”
or
socialist enlightenment.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in New York City in 1940, John Curl's family was a mixture of Irish Catholic, English Protestant, and Romanian and Austrian Jew. One grandfather was a Republican, the other a Communist, and his parents New Deal Democrats. During the winters he grew up in New York City, and during the summers in New Jersey farm country without electricity or running water. His father was a post office worker, and his mother had been a show girl before she became mom, working for a while with Abbot and Costello. He has a degree in Comparative Literature from New York City College. He currently resides in Berkeley, California with his wife, and has one daughter. He is a professional woodworker by trade. He was a founding member of Indigenous Peoples Day in 1991, and has worked on the Berkeley powwow for over 20 years. He is vice-president of PEN Oakland, "The blue collar PEN." His play *The Trial of Christopher Columbus* was produced by the Writers Theater in 2009. His transliterations from Quechua formed the libretto for Tania León's *Ancient* (2009). He represented the USA at the World Poetry Festival in 2010 in Caracas, Venezuela, and received a 2013 Golden Seal Book Award from Artists Embassy International. He is a member of the Revolutionary Poets Brigade and one of the founders of Social Justice Month.

OTHER WORKS BY JOHN CURL

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Scorched Birth (2004)
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