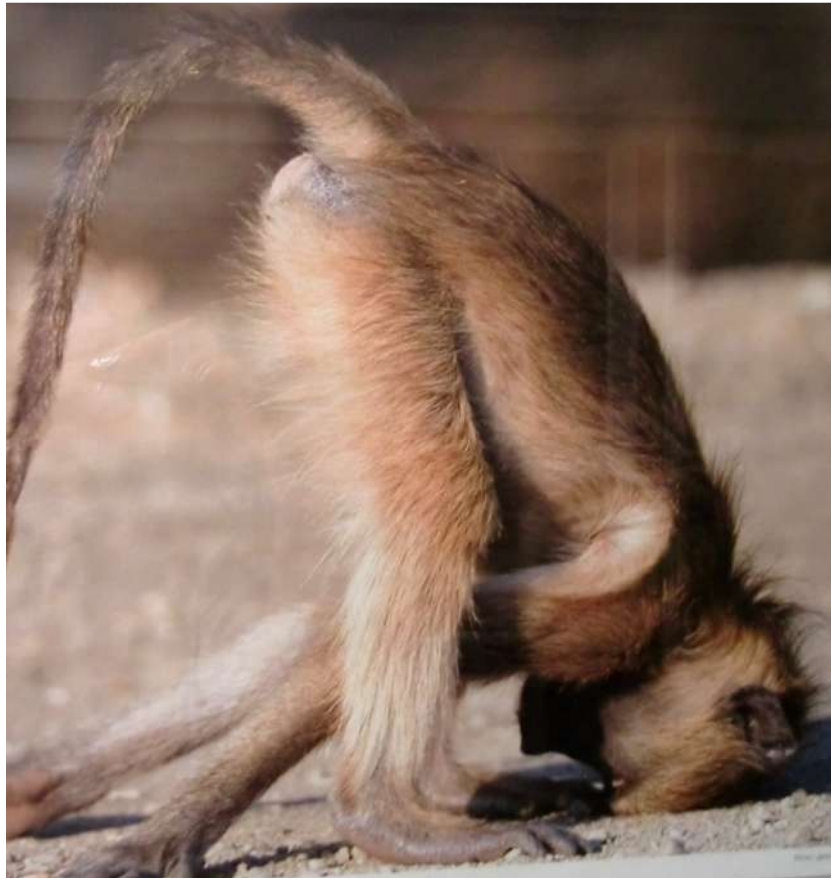


Animals in Yoga

Philosophy and Postures



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May all beings live happy and in peace and free from suffer, fear and pain.

May my thoughts, words and actions help to achieve this.

May we all live in peace with whatever may come.

And may we all rest peacefully in the softness of our hearts.

Purpose of this work/thesis motivation

Animals, my deep-felt love for them, my interest and dedication to study their behavior, to support their welfare and work for their preservation and conservation, has been the golden thread in my life. I always felt a deep connection with nature, so I started to study it scientifically. Scientific work on animal sociobiology and cognition clearly expressed that animal minds are much more conscious than realized so far, delimitations to us as human primates only exist in our own minds.

However, I always felt that there is far more beyond evidence-science, which cannot be expressed or studied in our nowadays understanding. It seems, we as mankind are still not at the point where we fully understand the network of life and its connections in a physical but also, if not more important, in an energetic way (emotional, mental-intellectual, spiritual) – in holistic means.

I came to yoga and also Zen in my early twenties but first just in the physical – rajastic – way. During 2.5 decades I lost consciousness of the connection between my inner search and yoga. I started practicing yoga again on the physical level for health reasons. With the help of my teachers and own further literature studies I gained more insight in yoga philosophy and began to understand the large overlap with my own ideas and explanation models on living rules and relations towards other living beings. However, I feel that my scientific knowledge can be very well integrated into yoga and that they may also benefit each other with explanations. Interestingly, during my research for this thesis I came across much more connection between animals and yoga and got to know more people on this way than initially expected.

And I deeply believe that only coming back to our connection with nature can be the starting point of changes in the world towards more empathy, living a moral life in peace. In the end they are in us and we are in them – sharing a lot of DNA and all the evolutionary steps – in body, emotions and mind.

Inspiration – Connection – Compassion

Iris Weiche

Tübingen, 2017

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Animals in religion and philosophy

Though yoga is no religion but a philosophical way of life, there are important religious elements (as Atman, the Devine, the Higher Self). Many basic rules of all main religions and philosophies correspond to each other (e.g. treat others as you want to be treated yourself). There are also equal statements concerning animals, always seen as heavenly creatures, regarding their treatment or use for food and against killing in Christian, Judaic and Islamic holy texts; however, mostly this was in later times laid-out in different ways and according to cultural Zeitgeist (Dahlke 2011). Buddha says that eating meat destroys compassion and in mamsa it is said that killing animals for own sake (atmartha) is forbidden (5.45; Feuerstein 2011).

According to Aristotle, the soul is the *form* or *essence* of any living thing and it is the possession of a soul that makes an organism an organism at all (Aristoteles. De Anima. After Shiffman 2011) However, he distinguished between the sensing soul of animals and the rational soul of humans and with this started a centuries lasting discussion on the differentiation of humans and animals which mostly was anthropocentric motivated, so to highlight the seemingly distinguished position of humans. French philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) wrote an influential reconsideration of ancient, especially Pyrrhonian thinking, that challenges the differentiation of man and animal, questioning the hierarchical order.

In his pioneering encyclica „*Laudato si*“ Pope Francis points at the importance of manifold relationships between humans and animals (p. 89), members of the same universal family.

“33. It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves.”

“42. [...] Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. [...]”

“This sister [earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.”

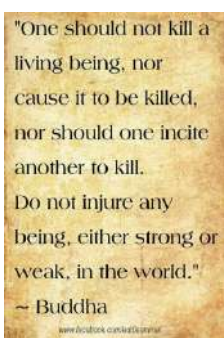
“Nothing in this world is indifferent to us.”

Animals in Indian and yoga philosophy

As Yoga derived from the Indian subcontinent, its expression towards animals also stems from these cultural origins. In ancient times, animal sacrifice was part of vedic rituals, but only there allowed. However, the seers of the Upanishads revolted and in the Rig Veda (X. 87.16) all forms of killing, either animals or humans, and meat eating was condemned. This was pursued by Gautama Buddha and Mahavira Jina, however, this was never vested in Asian culture or even in Hinduism as an edict against animal sacrifices. Although there have been and are some bans or Prohibition Acts, still several parties and tribes claim sacrifices as their cultural gifts (as we also now from all over the world). We have to keep in mind, that this has also been the case with human sacrifices, which mostly all over the world would be banned nowadays, seeing it as primitive and cruel acts.

Why is this not the case for animals? Though most spiritual leaders in ancient and recent times claim the unity of nature and connection of all creatures, still animals seem to be disregarded and disrespected, always intellectually organized in stairway levels far more beyond human value or mind.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes: *“A human being is an animal, a part of nature. But we single ourselves out from the rest of nature. We classify other animals and living beings as nature, as if we ourselves are not part of it. Then we pose the question, “How should I deal with Nature?” We should deal with nature the way we deal with ourselves. Harming nature is harming ourselves, and vice versa.”* (Hanh 1985).



In the Buddhist teachings, animals are not lesser or “other”. This ethic is consistent with Buddhist philosophies of karma and oneness. For a Buddhist practitioner, harm done to others is harm done to oneself, for we are all one, and we are bound by karma. The Bodhicharyāvatāra of Shantideva (*Tare*, about 600 CE) teaches that fellow creatures are the same as the practitioner. The buddhist is to remember that *“All have the same sorrows, the same joys”* and must be protected. We are all equally fellow creatures.

“There is never a hint in Buddhist teachings that intellectual ability, a sophisticated sense of self, or any characteristic beyond the ability to suffer is relevant to moral standing.”

Ashoka, Indian emperor during the 3rd century BCE, converted to Buddhism after cruel wars and intended to spread the Dharma teachings. In his edicts he declared that injuring living things is forbidden, and no animal should be sacrificed for slaughter. He imposed a ban on

killing several special animals, castration at certain times, killing nursing animal mothers as well as nursed offspring. Ashoka also abolished the royal hunting of animals and restricted the slaying of animals for food in the royal residence. Because he banned hunting, created many veterinary clinics and eliminated meat eating on many holidays, the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka has been described as "one of the very few instances in world history of a government treating its animals as citizens who are as deserving of its protection as the human residents".

The animal case in yoga

Spiritually, in yoga there is no distinction between human beings and other life forms. Early teachers and holy spirits often lived in and with nature, tolerated by wildlife and so gained a deep insight and understanding of animal lives surrounding them. From the Rig Veda texts onwards organisms mostly appear to be organized on a straight horizontal line with no emphasis on more or less value in any respect. The One, the Devine, is in all creatures and nature. However, rebirth legends neglect this and are again hierarchically organized.

Myths about animals and their transformation states have a long tradition in Indian art (Krishna Murthy). In the interpretation of Jayram Hindu scriptures clearly state, that *bhutas* are also subject to the circle of birth and rebirth with their own language and intelligence. Likewise, animals appear as divinities in Buddhism and Jainism. Often *Buddha* was depicted as elephant and *Mahavira*, founder of Jainism, is often hooded by a multi headed serpent. Not harming creatures is an essential part of these philosophies. Saivism even goes one step beyond in stating all living beings as *pasus* (animals). Every being can be liberated when overcoming bonds and realizing true consciousness. Therefore compassion for animals (*bhuta daya*) should be under highest virtue.

In Yajur Veda 12,32 it says, that one may not use the heavenly created body to kill other heavenly creatures, be it human or non-human. Jainism, dedicated to ahimsa, states in Sutra-kritanga, that one also should not keep company in any way with others who kill creatures. In accordance with this are texts of Bahai, Sikhs and Confucianism (Dahlke 2011, p. 284-285).

„*sarvam khalvidam brahma* – And really, everything is Brahman.“

– Chandogya Upanishad (2.14.1)

In the Upanishads it is said that from Brahman, the absolute universal soul, the entire cosmos has manifested and from him all forms of life evolved. Interestingly, in a legend Vishnu (as

sun) and Narayana (non-vedic deity of the water) are combined and said to be responsible for the beginning of life – which is very similar to evolution theories.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika is the most important text on the physical oriented Hatha Yoga. It was written by Svātmarama somewhere between 13rd and 17th century BCE. Other important texts are Goraksha Sataka, Shiva Samhita and Gherandha Samhita.

Though **Patanjali** (between 2.000 BCE and 800 CE) is not the founder of Hatha Yoga, his sutras and ethical rules therein, before that time mainly orally transferred, are mostly cited as basis for yoga nowadays. In each part of the eightfold path of Patanjali there are many connections to the animal (also to the botanical) world and the unity of all living beings. For example the Yamas and Niyamas are not only considering the behavior towards other humans



Buddhism also commits to compassion for all living beings. © Elephantjournal.com

but are moral rules towards all life on earth. Sharon Gannon, founder of Jivamukti Yoga, states, that humans, as a matter of business, misuse the reproductive capabilities of food animals. The sexual abuse of animals is ingrained in human culture, and it expresses itself in the practice of breeding, genetic manipulation, castration, artificial insemination, forced pregnancy, routine rape, and child abuse, which all fall under the category of “animal husbandry”.

All of these routine animal practices might be considered to be seriously out of alignment with brahmacharya, and this misalignment hurts both them and us. Female food and dairy animals “are forced to become pregnant over and over again until their fertility wanes, at which point they are slaughtered and eaten. Male animals chosen to be sperm donors are sexually abused repeatedly, live in constant frustration, and in the end are slaughtered as well. Such practices are violent, crass and degrading to animals, as well as dehumanizing for the farm workers paid to do this work.” (Gannon 2012)

Yamas

- *Ahimsa* traditionally meant “do not kill or hurt“. This can be extrapolated to mean that we should not be violent in feelings, thoughts, words, or actions. At root, ahimsa means maintaining compassion towards yourself and others. It means being kind and treating all living beings and things with care.

- *Satya* (no falsehood): Also if animals for meat/milk production are treated well during their lifespan, they are finally meant for human consumption, which are false pretenses toward them.
- *Asteya* (don't steal): Getting eggs, milk (food for animal offspring), fur, and animals themselves, taking offspring away from their mothers, etc. is not in compliance with *Asteya*, all ethics of respect for the animal as sacred being and their rights for life.
- *Brahmacharya* would ask us to rethink how we treat animals. "Expanding love, kindness and compassion to include *all* others – animals as well as the earth Herself – is our next big step in human consciousness." [...] The yamas are about how to treat others – to achieve the aim of dissolving otherness. As Patanjali lists: As long as you see others and not the "One" – not the Self – then don't hurt them, don't lie to them, don't steal from them, don't abuse them sexually, and don't be so greedy as to cause them to become impoverished."
- *Aparigraha* (non-hoarding/non-covetousness): Hoarding animals can become a pathological greed; however, I also count the endless food production as hoarding. To date, the human society in so called developed countries has an overload in meat and milk products. Stables are built for many thousands of poultry, pigs, cattle, where the individual lives and life quality is non-existing.

Niyamas

The five niyamas are more "inner" observances, i.e. how we take care of our mental/spiritual landscape. In relation to our fellow animals (as outlined below), all ethic rules can remind us to take care in all our life actions, be it nurturing our body with certain food or be it our behavior or thoughts and understanding towards nature and animals as part of us.

- *Shauca* (purity) Purity of the mind, the soul and the body – includes e.g. healthy food which was not produced under woebegone circumstances and also being clear about the deep connection with nature, our place of being just one part of the puzzle and the assignment towards our fellow beings to support their well-being.
- *Samtoshā* Contentment in regard to nature and animals for me means not bringing in anthropogen changes and challenges to nature.
- *Tapas* Self-discipline in being straight forwards in ethic movements and restricting oneself to necessities.
- *Svadhyaya* Self-reflection of our thoughts and actions and their consequences, in this regard towards being harmful to nature.

- *Ishvarapanidhana* Contemplation of the true self, which is all there is within us.

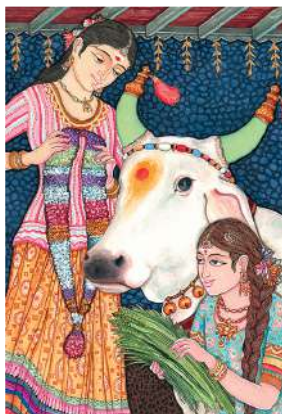
The negative

The doctrine of karma implies that souls are reborn as animals because of past misdeeds. Being reborn as an animal is a serious spiritual setback.

Because to the ancient beliefs non-human animals can't engage in conscious acts of self-improvement they can't improve their karmic status, and their souls must continue to be reborn as animals until their bad karma is exhausted. Only when they are reborn as human beings can they resume the quest for nirvana. This bad karma, and the animal's inability to do much to improve it, led people in the past to think that non-human animals were inferior to human beings and so were entitled to fewer rights than human beings. The idea that animals were spiritually inferior was a justification for the exploitation and mistreatment of animals.

Nowadays there are various scientific evidences that consciousness is not unique to humans. Furthermore, it is scientifically proven and verifiable in physically measurable parameters that animals experience emotions like joy and grief as humans (Barash 2014, Bekoff 2014).

Animals and gods in yoga philosophy



The cow as a symbol of wealth, strength, abundance, selfless giving and a full earthly life
©CC BY-SA 2.5

So, all beings are manifestations of god (at a “lower” level of evolution), having equal status and all possess souls! Animals as creatures are said to be bound to limits of consciousness. However, as manifestations of God at a lower scale they can get salvation and are capable of becoming human in future lives. Animals play a profound part in yoga philosophy:

- Gods appear as animals (ability to transform) and vice versa (Hinduistic and Buddhist philosophy)
- According to Hatha Yoga Pradipika, certain animals were avatars of Lord Vishnu:
 - 1. Fish (Matsyendra)
 - 2. Turtle (Kurma)
 - 3. Boar
 - 4. Half Human, half Lion

- Philosophy connects all living beings, e.g. in mantras
- Chakras are connected to an animal
- Asana positions reflect animal characteristics or behavior

In the following, these above points will receive a closer look and some examples are given.

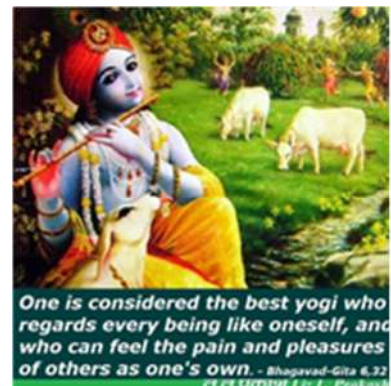


Dattatreya, incarnation of Trimurti Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, accompanied by the holy cow (mother earth) and four dogs (Four vedas). © yogawiki

Trimurti Brahma (*Dattatreya*) stands for the principle of creation; he is Lord of the Beings (*Prajapati*).

Dyaus Pita (father heaven from Rig Veda, parallel to roman Jupiter or greek Zeus) and Prithivi Mata (mother earth), the most ancient pair of gods in vedic literature, were symbolized as taurus, sometimes a black horse with pearls representing the stars, and cow (still sacred in Hinduistic religion). They were parents of Agni, Indra, Ushas and Surya. These were in later literature replaced by Shiva, Vishnu and their various incarnations (avatars).

Vishnu's incarnations are also oriented on an evolutionary stairway. First he appeared as fish (Matsya), than tortoise and boar, later on as mixture of lion and man (Narashimha depicts the transition of evolution), as Varamana and as Krishna, who himself appeared as transcendental abode Gopala or Govinda herding cattle. As Matsya he first appeared in the Mahabharata in a similar story as Noahs Ark. Matsya led the arc across the floods also rescuing the sacred hymns of the Vedas.



Krishna as Gopala

Shiva is also associated with Nagas (cobra snakes). The snake stands for all the evil and demonical nature in the world. By wearing the snake (Vasuki) around his neck, Lord Shiva gives us the assurance that no evil can touch or destroy us once we surrender to him.

The snake around the neck of Shiva conveys the meaning that in him the kundalini not only has arisen fully but is also actively involved in the divine activity by keeping an eye on all the devotees who approach Shiva with their individual problems. The snake also stands for all passions and desires. By wearing the snakes around his neck, Lord Shiva shows that he has overcome all desires and fears. According to other sources, the snake and the Vishudda Chak-



Shiva wearing the snake around his neck.
© santabanta.com

ra are connected as sources of poison. Shiva drank the poison that was meant to destroy the world. The poison stopped in his throat and colored it blue.

As incarnation Pashupatinath or **Pashupati**, an old form of Shiva he is the lord of all creatures and has complete control on their behavior, is the guardian of the animals, (Pashu in Sanskrit means “animals”, but also “soul”!),

which means that the god cares for all beings, the divine is in every being and that it is our obligation to care of them. Likewise, the animals see him as their friend.

Buddha, as Gautama Siddharta, lived 483 BC. Experiencing his love, compassion, charity and ahimsa, snakes guarded him in his meditation under the Bodhi Tree and the serpent-king Muchalinda protected him from a raging storm. In some texts it is mentioned that some of his early converts were Nagas, a snake-worshipping tribe in ancient India (Krishna 2010). Though it is not explicitly forbidden to eat meat, in Sutta Pitaka in the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism (Bodhi 2012) it is said: "Monks, the taking of life — when indulged in, developed, & pursued — is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry shades. The slightest of all the results coming from the taking of life is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to a short life span. (Anguttara Nikaya, 2. Chapter, A.VI. 18: The killer of animals and humans). The Buddhist should never ask to catch or kill animals otherwise he will gain threefold guilt (“Majjhima Nikaya, 55. (VI,5)).“

In modern **Mahayana Buddhism** ahimsa gets a different significance, not just to free oneself, but as resonance on deep felt compassion and concern for the welfare of other living beings. Bodhisattva is the ideal conception, to help all creatures being free from suffer and its causations. Eating meat equals cannibalism as all living beings are sensitive creatures. They have the tathāgatagarbha, the Buddha nature, and therefore the same live essence as oneself, which means that they resemble us (Lankavatara Sutra; Gyonen 1240-1321, Angulimaliya-Sutta). The present Dalai Lama condemns sports fishing and hunting as well as industrial livestock farming (tierbefreiung.de). In Tibetan Buddhism especially dogs are well respected and recognized as having a soul.

Ganesh

An elephant traditionally stands for wisdom, intelligence, outstanding memory, serenity,



Shiva and Parvathi are bathing their elephant-headed son Ganesh. © Kangra miniature, 18th century- Allahabad Museum, New Delhi.

power, endurance; further on we know that elephant groups are led by old females, who have generation-spread knowledge of where to find food but esp. water. They protect their family members, they guide them when injured, and they mourn their dead. Furthermore, an elephant is very sensitive and careful (in emotional but also physical regard, esp. the trunk, the feet and the skin). An elephant is a symbol for wholeness and holistic view in its round form.

Numerous legends exist on Ganesh's "creation"; however, he seems to be the "youngest" god, as he namely does not appear in the Vedic literature, but in the 5th century in the puranas. The main theme is that Parvathi, wife of Shiva, created a son, named Ganesh, while Shiva was on a journey. As a guardian Ganesh had to keep all strangers off Parvathi's chambers. When Shiva returned home, Ganesh refused to give entrance to this stranger, so Shiva beheaded Ganesh. Parvathi persuaded Shiva, to restore Ganesh's life and Shiva, realizing the killing of his son, sent out servants to the north to bring him the head of the first being they would encounter. This was an elephant, and Lord Shiva blessed his new son with a head of one of the wisest animals as the Lord of all beginnings.

The big head and ears show wisdom through listening and thinking. The four arms of Ganesh show his virtuosity and divine might, but also the four etheric aspects: mind, intellect, ego, consciousness. The weapon, mostly an axe (following his fight against Parashurama, where he lost his second tooth), is sign for fighting all evil, with which he can cut off desires and attachments. The mudra blesses and protects on the spiritual path, the rope pulls towards spirituality. The lotus flower is sign for mental reincarnation. His favorite sweets are in another hand, showing his soft spot (which makes him quite sympathetic to humans), but also the sweet gains of spiritual search. His belly symbolizes richness but also absorption of all experiences in life. The mouse or rat is his mount and stands for egoism and unconsciousness, which Ganesh mastered and was able to "ride"; so it is a symbol for intelligence and power in overcoming all obstacles.



Ganesh in Indian religion.
© Adityamadhav83

So Ganesh as a god for music, poems, literature, dance, science and trade gives a good start and supports all activities, esp. learning and studying. He is friendly, removes obstacles (but also can create them if disrespected), gives luck, success and security for new projects, spends hope, confidence and fertility. He also has a playful sense of humor and likes sweets. Philosophically he represents control over the human ego and the ability, that even the smallest being can incorporate the divine revelation.

The intermingling of elephant and human thus combines the characteristics of the animal and the human mind in raising the level of consciousness of those pristine features. In Mythology it stands for micro- and macrocosms. Nowadays, he guards every temple.

Hanuman

Hanuman stems from the grey (“Hanuman”) langur monkeys (*Presbytis entellus*) in Asia. A monkey traditionally stands for intelligence and agility, playful teasing, but also for altruistic help to family and friends.

In the mythology Hanuman, 7th incarnation of Vishnu, son of the wind god Vaju and Anjana Devi (through a ban living as a female monkey), was a powerful and brave hero travelling the countries. From his youth he had the powerful characteristics of his father and Brahman has given him immortality after an incident with other gods. One day Hanuman met Lord Rama who was in search for his beloved Sita. Sita has been captured by demon Ravana. So Hanuman decided to help Rama



Hanuman, from the Ramayana epos. © Anant Shivaji Desai



Hanuman langurs.
©Dirk Vorderstraße

and together with his monkey army he found the demon in the city Lanka. Hanuman transformed his body to a monkey so he could better sneak into the hiding place. He found Sita, however, she was afraid of the speaking monkey and denied to follow him as it should be Rama himself to free her and to restore his reputation. So Hanuman changed his plan, destroyed Ravana’s palace as well as big parts of the city Lanka and led Rama into town.

After the conquer Rama and Sita insisted on honoring Hanumans help, though he himself did not desire any reward. Sita gave him a necklace with precious stones; however, Hanuman took it off and peered out every stone. Asked for the reason of destroying this invaluable gift, Hanuman replied, he wants to know, if Rama and Sita are visible in those stones, otherwise they would

not be of value for him. Following, several attendants doubted his deep-felt reverence and love for Rama and Sita. Then Hanuman opened his chest, and everyone could see Rama and Sita literally in his heart.

So Hanuman symbolizes intelligence, modesty, humility, devotion, trust, faithfulness and loyalty as well as physical power combined with gentleness – a real Karma yogi. With these aspects he evolved in his spiritual mind. As son of the wind god he is also patron for pranayama.



Green Tara. The foot position shows her readiness to stand up and go into action. ©Kaykonrad.de

Green Tare

I personally feel connected with the Green Tare. She stands for peacefulness (green), the active empathy of all Buddhas, increasing the original wisdom and lead to enlightenment. The right hand is opened in the mudra of giving. She protects against the eight anxieties as internal obstacles, which are: proudness (lion), blindness (elephant), rage (fire), envy (snake), wrong views (thieves), stinginess (bondage), doubt (demons), and desire (flood).

In one legend the Tare was a princess, which did a huge amount of good work and therefore gained a mind-like Bodhisattva honor. When the monks asked her to beg for a rebirth in a male body to progress further in her enlightenment, she refused it as narrow-minded that enlightenment should be limited by gender. She claimed to be reborn again and again as women to free all beings and lead them to final peace and freedom. Therefore she is also called the “mother of liberation”.

Mantra: Om tare tuttare ture soha

Animals as god companions (vahanas)

Hindus see divinity in all living creatures. Animal deities therefore, occupy an important place in Hindu dharma. Animals, for example, are very common as form of transport for various Gods and Goddesses. The entire clan of Shiva is replete with ecological symbol-



Nandi

ism. Shiva’s consort Parvati is considered the daughter of the mountain. She is the personification of Mother Earth. In Hindu

stories and iconography, there is a close relationship between the various deities and their animal or bird mounts. Each divinity is associated with a particular animal or bird, and this lends a special dimension to the animal kingdom.



Gayatri as incarnation of Parvathi, Sarasvati, etc. as consort of Brahma. and her swan Hamsa.

All gods use animals as mounts or vehicles; however, these companions do not submissively serve, but voluntarily and in cooperation – in the sense of Bhakti, and are also gods themselves. They also symbolize the power of the gods they serve on earth, the qualities or skills which need to be strengthened by the help of this god. For example, Brahma rides the swan **Hamsa**. Hamsa is the mantra of unity of Atman and

Brahman, the water-fowl is a symbol for the soul, purity can



Vishnu seated on Adishesha, coiled 3.5-fold.
© kmkvaradhan.wordpress.com

be seen in the white coat. Vaju, god of the winds, rides on an **antelope**, representing the lightness and absence of gravity. Indra rides on the white elephant **Airavata** (one of the gems coming out of the milk ocean, symbolized by large rain clouds bringing prosperity), who also often accompanies Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity. Shiva rides on the taurus **Nandi**, Vishnu on the bird **Garuda**, Durga on a **tiger**. Tab. 1 gives an overview.

Tab. 1 **Gods and their vehicles** (from www.hinduwebsite.com)

God	companion
Brahma/Gayatri	Swan (Hamsa)
Ganesha	Mouse, Rat
Vishnu	Eagle (Garuda)
Shiva	Bull (Nandi)
Indra	Elephant (Airavatha)
Agni	Ram
Sarasvathi	Peacock
Lakshmi	Owl
Parvathi	Lion
Ganga	Crocodile (Makara)

Adishesha, a serpent and semi-divine being, is associated with Lord Vishnu, representing divisions of time. Ananta as another prominent serpent deity is king of the serpent world, though several serpent kings are mentioned in different Indian cultures, as the Naga tribe, and legends, esp. from ancient Kashmir. Even today they play a vital role, esp. in South-West India. Concerning the different types of serpents it is especially the spectacled cobra with its impressive hood is regarded as sacred. As a yoga symbol, Kundalini, the latent primordial energy of the universe, which is visualized lying 3.5-fold coiled at the base of the human spine, the snake is present in and taken by the serpent qualities of flexibility and energy (Krishna 2010).



Curling of the milk ocean. ©onfaith.co

Holy creatures?

Though these animals mentioned above and others are sacred in Asian religions, still a lot of torture and cruelty is present, also often in the name of honoring them, e.g. in the case of temple elephants, kept solitary and chained on hot surface – unbelievable that these highly social, gentle and intelligent beings resign to this fate.



Temple elephant, solitary and chained.
Source: www.frontline.in

Bringing back the philosophical origins of unity in nature, also stated in yogic literature, back to people's mind could also help on the way to more peace in all souls and natural energetic vibrations.

Also cows, symbol for mother earth, and bulls, representing Shiva's vahana Nandi, are often neglected, have to survive from garbage, and – though legislation in each Indian state territory is different on this – many of them end in unbelievable cruel treatment and slaughtering in Bangladesh.



©peta.org

Kundalini & chakras



Kundalini-Chakras
(<http://awakening.goypaz.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/kundalini-chakras.jpg>)

The concept of Kundalini (see also above) is mentioned in the Upanishads (9th century BCE – 3rd century BCE). It is one of the components of an esoteric description of the "subtle body", which consists of nadis (energy channels), chakras (psychic centres), prana (subtle energy), and bindu (drops of essence).

Kundalini is also often described as a snake, however, in the sense "coiled", as in "forming ringlets". The Sanskrit adjective *kuṇḍalin* means "circular, annular".

Kundalini is seen as a sleeping, dormant potential force in the human organism, being coiled up at the

base of the spine. Mostly seven main chakras are mentioned in the literature, though there are more and Krishnamacharya described 10 in his Yoga Makaranda. The chakras 1–5 are associated with animals, representing their characters. The number of leaves equals the number of nadis which connect this chakra to the rest of the body.

Muladhara-Chakra (1), connected to earth, basis of trust and life energy, has the taurus or the white elephant Airavata/Ganesha – symbolizing stability, endurance and power.



Svadhista-Chakra (2), center of sensitivity, family, creativity and sexuality. As it is connected to the water element, it shows ocean or water animals like fish or crocodile – which connect to the element of water in this chakra.



Manipura-Chakra (3), energy center of Surya and Agni, for personality, self-control, courage and motivation, showing a ram as symbolic animal for power of fire.



Anahata-Chakra (4), heart, spirituality and empathy, place of the individual and cosmic soul, shows birds or antelopes for peacefulness, tolerance and openness. Antelopes are associated with the god of the wind, Vaju.

Vishuddha-Chakra (5), connected to the ether, stands for truth, inspiration, communication and sound, again shows the white elephant Airavata, companion of thunder god Indra.

The **Ajna-Chakra (6)** (“third eye”, middle of head) is the penultimate station in the ascent of the kundalini power along the spinal axis (Feuerstein 2011). The **Sahasrara-Chakra (7)** (crown of head) is the upper terminal point of the sushumna and the final destination of the kundalini power.

When awakened by meditation, Kundalini is said to rise up from the muladhara chakra at the bottom of the spine through the central nadi, called *sushumna*, inside or alongside the spine and reaching the top of the head. The progress of Kundalini through the different chakras leads to different levels of awakening and mystical experience, until Kundalini finally reaches the top of the head, sahasrara or crown chakra.

Mantras & animals

Various mantras embrace all living beings in their prayers. Some also praise empathetic gods how are connected to wellbeing of all creatures. Some examples are listed here.

- **AUM – OM**



The syllable has been variously held as the primordial vibration, the cosmic sound, "affirmation to something divine", in the Vedas or as symbolism for abstract spiritual concepts in the Upanishads. It is found in most ancient layers of the Vedic texts such as the Rig Veda, dated to be from the 2nd millennium BCE. Aitareya Aranyaka, for example, in verse 23.6, explains *Om* as an acknowledgment, melodic confirmation, something that gives momentum and energy to a hymn, the totality of sound, existence and consciousness.

The aphoristic verse 1.27 of Pantanjali's *Yogasutra* links *Om* to Yoga practice, as follows: "His word is **OM**." — *Yogasutra* 1.27

According to the *Vayu Purana*, *Om* is the representation of the Hindu Trimurti, and represents the union of the three gods: *A* for Brahma, *U* for Vishnu and *M* for Shiva. The three sounds also symbolize the three Vedas namely Rigveda, Samveda, Yajurveda.

Also recent recordings from the outer sun space with eruptions seem to sound Om-like. But personally even more startling on the one hand and unsurprising on the other I found the OM or AUM represented in many animal calls, e.g. wolves, cats or frogs. AUM in howling or callings in animals is an emotional expression and a social communication instrument. Given the fact that the early yogis tried to mimic nature with their postures, the OM represents the natural sound, which as the ultimate and all-origin sound probably is present in much more spaces (plants?) and beings than we can imagine.



© Retron/CC

According to Krishna there exists also an entire philosophic treatise, the *Mandukya* (Frog) Upanishad, which explains the meaning of the sound as stages of consciousness, wakefulness and deep sleep. The singing of the frogs shows that the prosperity bringing rains have come. Also, the frog is a symbol for reincarnation as it transforms through different forms (egg, tadpole in water to amphibian with lungs).

- **Ajapa Mantra:** *So ham, Ham sa.*

(I am this: The unity in the entity, connection of breath, energy, matter)

This Mantra expresses the breath (so/so for breathing in, ham for breathing out) or, as said in DhyanaBindu Upanishad 61 the soul. As Hamsa it stands also for the goose or swan, which in Hinduism represents the Self or the prana.

- **Ganesha-Mantra**

OM shrin gam saumya ganapataye

Vara varada sarva janam me

Vashamanaya svaha

(I praise you, Ganesha, for giving us a long, healthy and happy live. Please, bless us with prosperity.)



Ganesha yantra © Hasanthi

- **Lokah samastah sukhino bavantu**

ॐ लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनो भवन्तु

(May all beings live happy and in peace, without suffering, fear and pain.)

This is my favorite mantra and I use it at the end of the class in German words as a prayer.

- **Sarvesham-Mantra**

OM OM OM – sarvesham savastir bhavatu

Sarvesham shantir bhavatu

Sarvesham purnam bhavatu

Sarvesham mangalam bhavatu

OM shanti shanti shanti

(May all sensitive beings gain welfare, peace, perfection, calmness, happiness and prosperity.)

- **Siri Gaitra Mantra**

Ra Ma Da Sa

Sa Say So Hung

(Ra – Sun, Ma – Moon, Daa – Earth, Saa - Impersonal Infinity, Saa Say - Totality of Infinity, So - Personal sense of merger and identity, Hung - The infinite, vibrating and real.)

This mantra taps into the energies of the sun, moon, earth, and the Infinite Spirit to bring deep healing. It can be chanted to heal the self or to send healing energy to anyone you wish.

- **Mantra by Animal Yoga®**



Shree Pashupatinath, prerana, sambandha, karuna

(Great protector of all animals, give us inspiration, connection, compassion)

asmākaṃ sahabhūmijaiḥ vyaṃ prēritāḥ bhavāva

(Let us be inspired by our fellow earthlings)

vyaṃ viśhvē paśhukaruṇāvārdhanārthāya balam bhavāva

(Let us be a force for fostering more compassion in the world toward animals)

ātmasvabhāvaiḥ paśhumitraiḥ cha saha sambandhaṃ karavāmahai

(Let us connect with our animal friends and our own animal nature)

tasmin viśhvē vishvasāma yatrē'kamapi paśhuḥ kimapi kāraṇāt mānavajanyakaṣṭhaṃ kadāpi na bhokṣhyati

(Let us believe in a world where one day no animals shall suffer at the hand of humans for any purpose)

- **Om Pashupathayei namaha**

(Salutations to the Lord of the Animals)

With this mantra we consciously attune ourselves to our beloved fellow travellers of the Animal Kingdom.



Pashupati ©www.bluegorgon.com

Vegetarism/Veganism

There is evidence for vegetarism in the Vedas (somewhere between 4,000 and 1,500 BCE), Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Yoga Sutras and most sacred texts of Hindus. These scriptures unambiguously support the meatless diet. There was already a sense of oneness with creation. The idea of rebirth emerged as a central point, e.g. in the Upanishads. In these writings, gods take animal form, human beings have had past animal lives, and animals have had past human lives. How can you slaughter and eat rebirthed beings? All creatures harbored the Divine, so that rather than being fixed in time, life was fluid. (According to Spencer, a cow alone held 330 million gods and goddesses. To kill one set you back 86 transmigrations of the soul.) Dietary guidelines became explicit centuries later in the Laws of Manu, written between 200 BCE and 100 CE (*“There is no greater sinner than that man who...seeks to increase the bulk of his own flesh by the flesh of other beings.”*). However, in Manu also animal sacrifices to the gods were described. In later times some groups, as Jainas, felt no longer bound by Vedic authority, but to *ahimsa* (nonviolence), championed by Mahavira in the sixth century, and has emerged at the core of the vegetarian argument in modern times.

In the Bhagavad Gita, arguably the most influential text of the Hindu tradition (written sometime between the fourth and first centuries BCE), Krishna compares the world to a single banyan tree with unlimited branches in which all the species of animals, humans and demi-gods wander. *“Avoiding harm to all creatures... this is true knowledge. All else is ignorance.”* The text added to the vegetarian argument with its practical dietary guidelines. It specifies that *sattvic* foods (milk, butter, fruit, vegetables, and grains) *“promote vitality, health, pleasure, strength, and long life.”* Bitter, salty, and sour *rajasic* foods (including **meat, fish**, and alcohol) cause pain, disease, and discomfort.” At the bottom rung lies the *tamasic* category: “stale, overcooked, contaminated” and otherwise rotten or impure foods. These explanations have endured, becoming the guidelines by which many modern yogis eat.

Some later Indian sages strengthened the case for vegetarianism. Swami Vivekananda pointed out the communality we have with other animals: *“The amoeba and I are the same. The difference is only one of degree; and from the standpoint of the highest life, all differences vanish.”* Swami Prabhupada, scholar and founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, offered a starker pronouncement: *“If you want to eat animals, then [God] will give you... the body of a tiger in your next life so that you can eat flesh very freely.”*

In most cultures today, the rights of animals have at least prevailed over the ritual of sacrifice, if not meat eating. Scores of yogis live and eat with the understanding, as expressed by B.K.S. Iyengar, that a vegetarian diet is “a necessity” to the practice of yoga.

Additionally concerning milk products, yogis have to reflect nowadays practice in keeping depletion of animals, which is not in accordance with ahimsa and many other guidelines of yogic life. Milk is meant to nurture animal offspring; nowadays “production” of milk includes breeding of high performance milk cows with absurd tremendous udders, taking offspring away shortly after birth and rearing them artificially, mostly without contact to their mothers, with mental distress and suffering for both of them. Additionally, there are the tortures of production, living circumstances and finally their slaughter for the meat market in very young life.

In our modern world there is no necessity for dairy products for adults. On the contrary, humans originally had diet intolerances to animal milk products (as some Asians still and increasing parts of the population have nowadays) and adapted to it during the last millenniums with establishing settlements and livestock breeding.

II.31 jati desa kala samaya anavicchinna sarvabhaumah mahavratam

In this sutra, Patanjali acknowledges that only those very rare beings in all the worlds (sarvabhaumah) who have taken a “great vow” (mahavratam), are able to practice all five yamas without interruption (vicchinna), while the rest of us must adapt these guidelines to our current occupation (jati), the place where we live (desa), the time of day, month, or year (kala), or circumstance (samaya).

Animal asanas

Ancient yogis, mostly living in areas isolated from civilization, were watching and trying to understand nature and mirror this in most asanas. Animal asanas also stand for the wild and tamed the known and unknown energies in us.

According to Iyengar the names of the asanas stand for principles of development, like avatars, so these principles are memorized. The body takes the forms of various beings, which are the embodiment of the divine power. Thereby we are trained not to disprize any creature. As Iyengar says, the gamut of creation breathes through the same spirit, which takes myriad forms.

With practicing these asanas, we can chose, which energy channel we follow and try to harmonize the two parts in us. We can incorporate the good characteristics of the animal while being in the pose. Every animal has a sacred gift for humans to learn. Animal poses can help us to connect with powerful aspects of the soul that we often repress in our busy lives. Before coming into an animal pose, it can be helpful to imagine what it feels like to be that animal. We should try to envision where the animal lives, how its body moves, how it eats and how it plays.

In modern yoga styles the names of poses are mainly reflections of the outer appearance (like giraffe and seal). In Yin Yoga, a yoga style following Paul Grilley and Bernie Clark, that mainly focusses on joints and fascia, the postures are quietly held for several minutes with minimal engagement of the muscles and the same asanas as in the Hatha style are named differently – mainly after animals –, because the basic conditions are different. Following are **some examples** for traditional asanas reflecting animal postures and behavior.

Eagle (Garudasana)

The challenge of the Eagle Pose is twisting one leg around the other while balancing on one leg and then twisting the arm from the same body side around the other arm on shoulder height with fingers towards the sky.

The name Garuda, the king of birds and vehicle of Vishnu, derives from the syllable *Gri* (to swallow): he devours the snakes. Having a human upper body, his head and claws are eagle-like. Garuda was born brighter than a million suns, so large and with so



much energy that the gods got fearful and urged him to reduce this. Garuda had to free his mother Vinata, kept as a slave in the demonic snake town Patala, by bringing them some Amrita. Though being faced with obstacles, he mastered this and his mother was released. Garuda represents also the spiritual energy which devours the delusions of jealousy and hatred. He can change his size up to the situations, in the posture being small, spreading the wings being large, representing also the freedom of the mind in using it the most beneficial way. Snakes may also represent the hidden aspects of the mind, feelings and thoughts underneath the surface which Garuda can perceive (Choskyi 1988).

As one settles into the pose, the purpose becomes clearer. First we are in a large position representing our spiritual mind. Then we have to transform and become smaller and larger again when releasing the pose. As we have to be flexible and go through transformations in overcoming obstacles in our way in life and to full spiritual development.

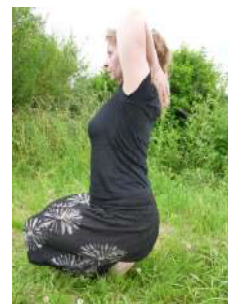
The third eye chakra (Ajna, the seat of sight and intuition) opens, improving vision. The eagle's superior vision relates to the third eye chakra. The gift of clear sight relates directly to the concentration we develop in yoga. Clear vision exists when the mind is focused and calm. Practicing balancing poses like Eagle Pose, concentration is aided by fixing the eyes on one point and taking a solid balance.

Just as the eagle can spot a mouse from thousands of feet away, Eagle Pose helps us to see what is important in life. Unfolding from the pose, our metaphorical wings spread, conveying a sense of lightness and a freedom from hindrances.

Question to pose: What may hinder your balance?

Boar (Varaha)

This posture stretches the inner arms, lifts the torso, and strengthens the thighs and the plantar fascia of the feet. It opens the ribcage and front body and activates the sense of balance as well as esp. the Manipura and Anahata chakra.



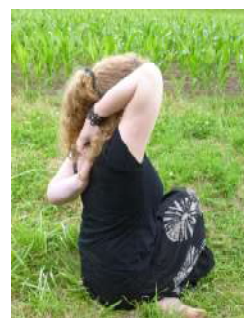
The Boar is the third incarnation of Vishnu and saved mother Earth from the ocean. With its tusks, symbolized by the raised elbows, it digs the earth and is therefore associated with agriculture, food production and thought to have taught humans how to plough the earth for better

fertility (Krishna 2010). The pose reminds us of stability and power to regenerate and to find inner balance while being actively looking forward and ready to act.

Question to pose: Where is my inner strength, my resource to fertilize my actions?

Cow Face (Gomukhasana)

Cow Face Pose is a stretching pose in which the human body, with a little imagination, looks like a cow's face. This pose is good for the spine (posture), stretches the arms and relaxes the shoulder muscles and groins as well as the scapulae. It activates the whole chakra line, especially the first four and grounds the body.



The cow is one of the sacred animals in India and all of her potential is used. Cows represent peacefulness, is connected with the earth, generous, motherly. Their relationship with her calves can be projected to the earth and her inhabitants. Shivas companion animal is Nandi, the bull, being strong and devoted. Krishna, as Vishnus avatar, cares especially for the cows as Gopala and Govinda. And he is all of them in one, the cows for the cowherd and the cowherd for the cows.

Another aspect of being nourished by the motherly cow nature is its associating with the rivers and mother Ganga. The water also means nourishment and the place when Ganga in the epics came to earth, supported by Shiva, is nowadays the Bhagirathi Glacier with its opening called Gaumukh (cow mouth), where the river Ganga in an already “mature” form flows out. The peaks look like cow ears.

So, in Gomukhasana we are showing a different face or side in us which may also be beneficial to others.

Question to pose: What hinders me to let just go all tension?

Camel (Ustrasana)

The camel is famous for its endurance. The camel is symbolic of journeying/pilgrimage and was domesticated in Asia (Middle East) and Africa some 5000 years ago. It has served humans in these areas for transportation, milk, wool and sadly meat. It is adapted perfectly to desert life and has a placid nature. Unlike any other animal, camels have oval-shaped red blood cells allowing the blood to keep flowing if dehydrated and blood thickens. They travel long but slow with heavy load – inspiration to us for going slower in hard times.



The outer benefit is flexibility of the spine, to strengthen the lower stomach muscles and the Gluteus maximus as well as stretching the abdominals and the thighs. It esp. opens the rib cage and with this the Manipura, Anahata and Vishuddha chakra and the heart. Upper and lower appendicular skeletons are connected. “Abdominal airbag” effect: the abdominal organs are pushed against lumbar spine (the rectus abdominus lightly contracts) to protect it (in addition to psoas and quadratus lumborum protecting the spine too).

Question to pose: What if we could adapt to things as they really are in present situations?

Cat (Marjaryasana)

Cat Pose (as an interchange with cow poses) opens the back, stretches shoulders and neck, increases spine flexibility and can help with relaxation if breathing deeply while coming in and out of the pose. It also strengthens the arms



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and shoulder muscles and joints. In tiger variations (e.g., one leg stretched upwards and chest opening) it also opens the rib cage and the hip. In the dynamic variation/interchange with cow/horse position it helps to release tension in the upper back/shoulder/neck region, increases agni, activates abdominal muscles, blood circulation, Svadhistana and Manipura chakra, reduces fatigue.

The cat family comprises small and large forms and in different cultures seen as goddesses. Their legendary nine lives symbolise rebirth and seizing new opportunity each day, each moment. They can stretch in various postures and have a flexible spine as well as muscles. When

on a catch they are present in each second and react directly. Socially they are soft and empathetic.

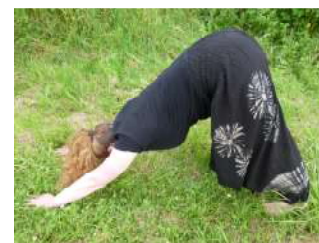
Question to pose: Can I be with my breath in every situation?

Dog Postures

Dogs accompany Shiva (as e.g. in incarnation Bhairava) and also Dattatreya, where they symbolize the four Vedas. In many legends, as in the one from Yudhishtira, the dogs are praised for their loyalty (Krishna 2010).

Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Downward-Facing Dog is a stable yoga pose to increase flexibility and to help release tension and elongates the spine. It stretches the whole backward muscle strings as well as the connective tissue from head to toes, the hamstrings, calves, arches, and hands. It strengthens arms, shoulders, and back, improves mobility of the digestive system. It relieves back pain, headaches, insomnia and fatigue and calms the nervous system. Balance between the front and back will keep the legs in harmony and lessen the risk of a pulled hamstring or quad. The pose activates the Muladhara and the Anahata chakra.



Question to pose: Can I be just within myself.

Upward facing dog (Urdha Mukha Svanasana)



©Disgruntled Exister

Upward facing dog can be held with pelvis on the ground or better pelvis lifted and only hands and feet touching ground. Upward dog can strengthen the spine, arms and wrists stimulate the organs of the abdomen, esp. the kidneys, improve posture, by stretching anterior spine and strengthening posterior spine, chest and lungs, shoulders and abdomen. Upward dog also stretches the quadriceps (front of the thigh) and the hip flexors (front of the hip). It keeps the wrists strong and flexible, tones arms and legs. Additionally, it helps to relieve depression, fatigue, pain of sciatica and increases lung capacity by opening the ribcage. In better lifted

postures, automatically our abdominal organs are in a better functioning position. It activates the Swadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata and the Vishudda chakra.

Question to pose: Is there any blocking in opening my heart, my mind?

Pigeon ([Raja-]Kapotasana)

The pose stretches the upper legs, opens the hips, increases flexibility in the hips and widens the breast. Especially, the piriformis is elongated as well as the psoas muscle. It activates the Swadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata and Vishudda chakra.



The country pigeon is known for puffing up its chest in pride. While they're not often recognized for this, pigeons have a unique ability to find their home from a distant location. Homing pigeons symbolize assurance and confidence in challenging situations. They represent a feeling of safety and security that allows a positive sense of pride about who we really are. For some of us, pride is a mask that hides feelings of incompetence, low self-esteem or unworthiness. Tapping into the joy of power and talent through the Pigeon Pose can help to develop confidence and assurance.

Question to pose: Which kind of pride is inside you?

Cobra (Bhujangasana)

The cobra moves with its belly on the ground but must reach up to see clearly. We are often kept busy with worldly pursuits and have to make an effort to reach for higher goals. It takes faith and courage to rise above the material world and peer into the unknown spiritual world. Once the upper body is poised above the ground in Cobra Pose, we must accept whatever it is we see from this new vista.



The cobra's ferocious nature cannot be ignored. It comes up suddenly and with deadly force, much like the workings of nature or the trappings of the world and with her poison here also stands for *Avidya* – misconception – and *Abhinivesha* – our fear to die. The cobra's gift is in its ability to shed its skin. It is this shedding of skin that allows the cobra to continually trans-

form and renew itself. Also, the snake is a symbol for our abilities to overcome all anxieties on the way to enlightenment. One cannot run away from fears but has to face them and observe them from a neutral distance in each perspective.

The very nature of life involves frequent shift and change. The archetype of the cobra inspires us to see the possibilities inherent in every situation, accept whatever challenges we may be facing, and embrace all stages of life.

In the end, epic Indian gods and demons used the snake power to lift up amrita – the way to immortality. Another beautiful connection is the snake's ability to sense vibrations, which is also the aim in Hatha Yoga (according to Hatha Yoga Pradipika) to get back to the fine inner vibrations (*Nadam*) and linking them to the cosmic vibrations.

The snake also stands for the energy, time and the power of kundalini, which is described as a coiled serpent lying dormant in the Muladhara chakra of all human beings and descends upwards when one starts ones spiritual journey and becomes increasingly divine oriented.

The breast is widely opened, the upper body and face erected, ready to face everything; the lower back is consciously relaxed while the eyes remain focused on heaven. Traditionally the hands are not used to support the body as the snake also does not have hands. The posture opens the rib cage and strengthens the heart; it promotes an open heart, tolerance, empathy, truthfulness, activity. It activates the Anahata, Vishudda and Ajna chakra.

In cobra pose we open up and look forward, ready to act. We can imagine a snake getting rid of her old skin and rising up in shimmering new energy to rise again.

Question to pose: What hinders you to follow your inner nature?

Crocodile (Makrasana)

In different variations this twist of the whole spine gives flexibility. The change between sides balances the body, the ribcage opens, and as shown in the photo, in some variations the stretch of the legs up to the lower back might also be included. The middle of the torso, the agni, Manipura and the Anahata chakra are activated.



The crocodile is one of the most ancient animals, which challenges to discover primeval strength, mainly in arms and core. The crocodile swims by oscillating movements of the spine and has to wrap around its victims with its whole body. But it also enjoys the warmth of the sun lying in the sand of the river and rolling around. The twist pose massages the inner organs and by its divers variations on the back or on the belly it functions also to neutralize tensions in the back following back- or forward bends. It also opens the rib cage, in some variations elongates the back of the legs and opens the hips.

Makara means a huge sea animal. The makara represents the ferocious, bestial power of desire that all too often may drive us to ruin. And yet, when properly directed, it is also the very current that carries us through life with joy and spontaneity and connects us to the creative power of the universe – all about balance, as with everything in yoga.

Question to pose: Are you flexible enough in your life?

Fish (Matsyasana)

The fish pose relieves congestion in the nasal passages. It strongly opens the ribcage, the shoulder and the heart region and therefore gives more volume to breath and opens the heart and the mind. It releases the abdominal muscles, the breast muscles, and the throat muscles and organs, and activates the Anahata, Vishudda and the Sahasrara chakra. By back bending, it also sets an impulse to the lower spine region for better nurturing.



As written in Mahabharata, Vishnu incarnated as a fish to save the Vedas that were lost in the ocean. In the beginning it was a tiny fish, which then grew out to save all other species. This legend is similar to Noah's Ark. The message is that all species are equally important in the divine scheme of the world (Krishna 2002).

The pose reminds also of the first yoga scholar (*Matsya*) who carefully listened to Shiva explaining yoga postures and techniques to Parvathi, being transformed and enlightened by the words. He decided to be reborn to spread his wisdom, which is explained in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, written by the Nath-Yogis.

Question to pose: Can I open myself to the world?

Butterfly transformation

Life is arranged in rhythms and changes in life are common, whether in- or outside. However, the inner transformations are not easy and need consciousness, trust and courage and mostly remain a life-long process, e.g. in living an ethic life according to the yamas and niyamas, and to be conscious of the kleshas in your inner self and in others. To symbolize this transformation, also on an evolutionary scale, I designed a sequence of asanas, where the common names are partly taken from Yin Yoga style, which concentrates more on fascia activity.



Butterfly transformation

First practice child pose, to symbolize the egg or larvae (Balasana) with relaxed shoulders, passive stretch of the muscular-fascial back-line. Next pose is the caterpillar (Pashimottanasana), stretching the back again including the back of the legs, dynamic and static, lasting for the next transformation, the long yin butterfly with soles of the feet together, but in a long distance from the perineum. The next pose is half-butterfly (Ardha Upavistha Konasana, Variation) to both sides to stretch the “wings” and finally complete butterfly (Baddha Konasana), followed by opening the body, balancing on sitting bones and spreading the “wings” (Open Lotus). This sequence can also be integrated in strengthening the chakras.

Question to pose: Am I open for inner transformation or for changes in life?

And there are **many more postures**, not named after animals, but – they don't seem to care....



Open Lotus by Brown Bear
©playbizz.com



Headstand by male bonobo. © Lola ya Bonobo



Malasana by male gorilla.
© L. Bartens



Halasana by juvenile gorilla, having fun.
©Anonymous



Supta Baddha Konasana variation by male gorilla.
© Anonymous

Conclusion

“It is natural and healthy to be good, compassionate, empathic, and moral to other animals. Do we need “more science” to be better or more compassionate? No, it is who we are. It is intrinsic to our common animal nature.” (Bekoff 2014)

Animals were honored in ancient philosophy as sentient beings and also in yoga nomenclature because the early philosophers realized that animals are involved in the karmic cycle as well as humans are and that animals had a life and a soul no less than humans have. This belief also protected animals and nature, but in modern times most of those thinking has gone.

Humans have the potential for conscious spiritual development. By far, we don’t know enough about animal spirits to say that this does not exist in highly cognitive developed non-human animals. We must overcome the belief that animals were created for men to use/misuse them. In Buddhism, this is unacceptable, because then humans must have been also created for animals as some animals may eat humans by chance (Dhammananda). However, even if the doctrines of religion and philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism, connected to yoga, state an equal status of men and animals, responsibly and kind treatment, the belief in karma implies, that that souls are reborn as spiritual inferior animals because of past misdeeds which means a serious spiritual setback. This inferiority led to being entitled fewer rights than humans, exploitation and mistreatment.

If we as a yoga community can reconnect the balance with nature, the knowledge of interdependence and interconnection between all living beings in us on our yoga way, we certainly will feel and honor the unity, overcoming speciesism, and re-establish our bond with nature for a vanishing hierarchical differentiation, but acknowledging all beings as bearing a soul as we do. Now finally also stated for the Christian belief in *Laudato si* (2015), non-human animals deserve dignity and respect.

To reconnect us with our inner animal can also help us to overcome constant fears that ratio puts to our mind. By opening blocks and tensions in our body, muscles and fascia we can transform also our mind and experience happy sensations in body and soul. This enables us to gain inner peace which we can transport into the outer world.

With rising awareness humans must acknowledge the vicinity to animals. And when we respect them as being as close as old myths have told, animal companions will be almost gone from earth. (Elias Canetti)

We are one with all.

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Hundsbach 2015

“Having a soul means being alive and being alive means having a soul.” (Aristoteles)

“All beings are in the Self and the Self is in all beings”. (BKS Iyengar)

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Curriculum vitae of my yoga path

- 3/1983 first yoga experience in Sri Lanka
- 10/2005 restart of yoga course attendance at University of Tuebingen (Germany)
(Inge Seefluth and other teachers)
- since 2008 teacher training courses with Yogacharya Jadranko Miklec (Croatia),
trainer certificate
- 2013/2014 Somatics trainings with Brian Siddhartha Ingle (India/USA)
- 2014 Yoga therapy teacher training, Michael Örs (Freiburg), **trainer certificate**
- since 2014 further yoga therapy trainings with Doug Keller, Jordan Bloom, Yoga Vidya
- 2014 Hormone Yoga teacher training with Lalla Turske (Berlin), **trainer certificate**
- 2014 Yin Yoga teacher training with Josh Summers (Boston), **trainer certificate**
- 2016 Yin Yoga teacher training, Mod. 5, Dirk Bennewitz (Hamburg)
- 2016 Yin Yoga teacher training, Mod. 1, Biff Mithoefer (Vermont)
- since 2014 further Yin Yoga/Fascia Yoga TT/workshops with diverse teachers
- 2016 Animal Yoga® teacher training with Jenny Mace (Eastbourne),
trainer certificate

Since 2009 further workshops on diverse subjects/yoga styles as Chi Yoga (LuNa Schmidt),
Yoga Ballet (Marcia Haydée), Gyrokinesis (Marco Santi).