

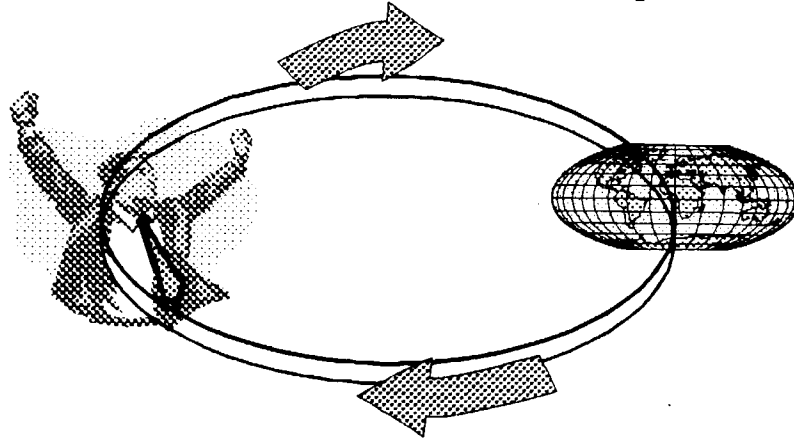
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# Yajna

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The cyclical process

- Person becomes cosmos / cosmos becomes person



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# Vedic Religion

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Yajna as central ritual

- Purusha Shukta / Sacrifice of primordial person brings about the cosmos
- Sacrifice establishes a correlation between the individual person and the cosmos
- Sacrifice as circular process “hints” at circularity of time

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## Traditional Goals

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- Sacrificial action (karma) brings about effects / results in the cosmos
- Traditional goals of sacrificial action:
  - ▶ Artha (wealth)
  - ▶ Kama (desire / fulfillment of desire)
  - ▶ Dharma (fulfillment of duties)
    - Also: Early mentions of heaven / svarga

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## Transition to Upanishadic Age

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Development of samsara notion

- Linear goals / aims problematic in a cyclical understanding of time
- Cyclicity of time itself becomes problem:
  - ▶ If time itself is cyclical, humans are caught in an endless cycle of birth, death, and re-birth
    - Gradual development of samsara notion
  - ▶ Classical goals of artha, kama, dharma, and svarga no longer seen as ultimate solutions, as samsara itself now is a problem.
    - Release (moksha/mukti) from this cycle is now paramount

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## Transition to Upanishadic Age II

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### Development of karma notion

- Understanding of interconnectedness of person and cosmos leads to realization that not just sacrificial action (early notion of karma), but **all action** (later notion of karma) has an effect on the cosmos.
- Just as “good sacrifice” brought “good results” for the sacrificer, now all good action brings good results for agent / bad action brings bad results

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## Upanishadic Age

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### Question of the self

- Inward focus: instead of outward ritual, Upanishadic sages look for interior reality behind (sacrificial) action
- Interiorization of fundamentals of sacrifice:
  - ▶ Sacrificial matter ➔ person / self
  - ▶ Sacred mantra ➔ knowledge of meaning (jnana)
  - ▶ Agni / fire ➔ internalized heat (tapas)
    - Tapas is read as austerities, i.e. ascetic practices intent on “burning up” wrong notions of self

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## Upanishadic Age II

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- Questions about inner essences lead to brahman - atman correlation:
  - ▶ in our essence / “soul” we are related to the essence of the cosmos at large: “tat tvam asi” (That thou are)
- Holistic realization of this correclation brings about release (mokhsa / mukti)
  - ▶ Shankara: advaita / non-dualism
  - ▶ Ramanuja: qualified dualism
  - ▶ Madhva: dvaita / dualism

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## Yoga

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- Yoga means literally: “Yoking,” i.e. uniting human self (atman) in some fashion with ultimate reality (brahman)
- Unity, or realization of the correlation between atman and brahman brings about release from samsara.
- Hindu tradition offers a variety of paths toward that goal, depending on a person’s strengths.

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## **The Way(s): Karma Yoga**

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Realization of moksha

- Karma yoga / The way of work
- Selfless action, following one's individual duty, while not getting attached to the fruits of action
  - ▶ Offering of selfless action as a sacrifice to the Lord; not adding layers of selfishness to one's soul.
  - ▶ Similarities with bhakti (see below)

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## **The Way(s) II: Jnana Yoga**

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Realization of moksha

- Jnana yoga: Way of Knowledge
- Knowledge is not just intellectual knowledge, but a holistic realization of atman - brahman correlation in one's life:
  - ▶ oftentimes involves ascetic practices, which "burn" wrong notions of self through "tapas"
  - ▶ Similarities with hatha yoga (way of meditation)

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## **The Way(s) III: Hatha Yoga**

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Realization of moksha

- Hatha yoga: (a.k.a. raja yoga / royal yoga)
- meditative realization of correlation b/w atman and brahman
- involves penetrating through wrongful associations of self to inner core: atman
- breath control is central in meditation.

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## **The Way(s) IV: Bhakti yoga**

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Realization of moksha

- Bhakti yoga: selfless devotion to one (or more) chosen deities
- Deity itself represents brahman (underlying essence of the universe)
- Bhakti is most popular of the four yogas
- In the process of devotion, wrong identifications with self are purified
  - ▶ Most prominent form of devotion is puja.