

The Astronomer & The Yogi

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When the astronomer looks out into space, he finds a vast realm of phenomena that seem of little concern to the rest of humanity – stars, nebulae, and galaxies into the seemingly endless depths of the distant past. When I was a boy it was assumed that this journey was endless, that the universe was infinite, and that there was, in effect, no “farthest reach” of space.

When the yogi “looks within,” he too finds a vast realm of phenomena that seem of little concern to the rest of humanity – thoughts, visions, and intuitions into a seemingly endless depth of inner space. When I began my practice of yoga as a young man, this journey too seemed potentially endless and the inner universe likewise infinite.

Over the decades since, understanding in astronomy and Yoga have both progressed. We now understand that Time itself had a momentous Beginning, out there beyond the farthest galaxies visible even in the Hubble Deep Field. Astronomers now clock that beginning quite precisely to 0.41Es ago (10^{18} s). And we’ve come to appreciate that we are still today pervaded by the remnant radio light from that event as the Cosmic Background Radiation that pours through our bodies in this moment – the most abundant photons in all the universe – leading the rest by a factor of ten.

Yoga too has revealed the limit of its inner journey. We now understand that as the Yogi lets go of inner phenomena and settles ever more deeply into the immediacy of Now, a Timeless Witness is eventually encountered deep within the seemingly unceasing flow of inner events. In the maturity of yoga practice, we come to appreciate that there is a Timeless Background within all of our experiencing. And we come to appreciate, suddenly or gradually, that all of Time is pervaded by That True Present in every moment. How could it be otherwise? Contemporary physics also speaks of what is in effect an inner limit of Time – the Planck Time – defined by the mathematics as 53.6rs (10^{-45} s).

So, although the Astronomer has looked one way and the Yogi the other, it turns out they have a number of things in common. They both have a common starting place – living in this world of ours in these human bodies we enjoy and suffer. It also turns out that by pursuing their method, they have both discovered a limit – the Big Bang out there, the Timeless Witness in here.

Put the two together and you have the beginning of the Yoga~Science. There is a single scale of time that connects both endeavors. The Astronomer is working on the one end of that scale, the Yogi the other, and in between they share the rhythms of daily living.