

# JR C | RELIGION & CULTURE

Volume 25



## Then & Now



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## Content

- 7      *Then and Now*  
An introduction by the Editor  
*Alexander Nachaj*

### *Articles*

- 11      *Freeing the Muslim Other to Conform*  
Spiritual Group-Based Affiliation and the State in Québec &  
France  
*Anelynda Mielke-Gupta*
- 31      *Maskilim in the Mishpuche*  
The Changing Family Structure as Portrayed within Yiddish  
Literature  
*Lily Chapnik*
- 44      *The Study of Religion as an Exercise in Problematization*  
Some Meta-Theoretical Considerations  
*Elyse MacLeod*
- 67      *Analyse structurelle du récit de la Pentecôte*  
Pour une interprétation des « langues comme de feu »  
*Joseph E. Brito*
- 91      *Disciplining Yoga*  
Foucauldian Themes in Sivananda Yoga Practice  
*Mark Eaton*

## ***Book Review***

- 107    ***Male Daughters, Female Husbands:  
Gender and Sex in an African Society***  
Joanna R. Schacter, reviewer
- 111    ***Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping  
of Modern African American Religion***  
Vaughn Booker, reviewer
- 116    ***Private Lives, Public Deaths:  
Antigone and the Invention of Individuality***  
Ildikó Glaser-Hille, reviewer
- 119    ***Queer Christianities:  
Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms***  
Daniel Santiago Saenz, reviewer
- 123    ***Call for Papers: Sexed Religion***

# Disciplining Yoga

## *Foucauldian Themes in Sivananda Yoga Practice*

Mark Eaton

### *Abstract*

This paper considers the yoga practices at the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center as “disciplinary” practices. Yoga has a long history of being interpreted as “discipline”; this paper will consider how it is disciplinary and what is being disciplined. To this end, this paper will frame Sivananda yoga as a discipline from two perspectives: Sarah Strauss’ characterization of yoga as an “oasis regime”; and Michel Foucault’s view of discipline as minute “carceral” elaborations of power. These approaches are contrasted and ultimately, following Foucault, yoga disciplines are understood as being constitutive of the subject. The disciplinary character of yoga at the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center is demonstrated using two objects as examples: a religious diary, and a set of japa mālā beads.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, disciplinary practices, yoga, Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center, japa mālā beads, Sarah Strauss.

**Y**oga, particularly in the Anglophone West, has recently become a topic of sustained scholarly interest. See for example, the work of Véronique Altglas, Elizabeth De Michelis, Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe, Verena Schnabële, Mark Singleton and Sarah Strauss.<sup>1</sup> Many of these studies have considered yoga as a “discipline”. Indeed, since Franklin Edgerton’s work on the Yogasūtras in the 1920s, yoga has frequently been translated in scholarly circles as “discipline”.<sup>2</sup> But what is it that is being “disciplined” in yoga practice? Is it an exercise discipline? Or is it a discipline of mindfulness, or of relaxation, or of devotion? Perhaps it is a secular discipline, or perhaps a religious one. The answers of yoga practitioners are diverse, reflecting the diversity of contemporary yoga practices.<sup>3</sup>

My concern here is how yoga disciplines the practitioner. Do yoga disciplines shape the subject in some way? Are individual practitioners shaped differently by these disciplines? I would like to know how these

disciplines are constructing the practitioner's subjectivity. How do yoga disciplines construct the reality of the person doing yoga? I am interested in a particular yoga community: the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre (SYVC) in Toronto. My analysis focuses on the way in which this particular community can be seen as a "disciplinary" yoga institution. I intend to use portions of the theoretical framework that Michel Foucault develops in *Discipline and Punish* (DP) to address SYVC practice.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, I am interested in Foucault's claims in DP that modern institutions serve disciplinary or "carceral" functions. In DP, he engages in a careful and extended analysis of the disciplines enacted by contemporary institutions. Below, I extend Foucault's analysis of "discipline" to yoga institutions. I maintain that a yoga institution such as the contemporary SYVC is a modern "carceral" institution in Foucault's sense. In what follows, I demonstrate that we can add a Foucauldian notion of yoga as discipline – a regime of control, regimentation and surveillance – to the already well-established scholarly interpretations of yoga as "discipline". This perspective on the discipline of yoga provides previously unconsidered insights into the role of yoga institutions. It raises interesting questions about the place of yoga in contemporary North American society, as well as about the constitution of the subject by his or her yoga practices. It also allows us consider the extent to which yoga practice can be an emancipatory and/or carceral practice. To support my analysis, I consider two objects commonly used at the SYVC as "disciplinary" objects: a religious diary, and a set of japa mālā beads.

### *Yoga at the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center*

For many in North America, yoga is an exercise program that provides fitness and relaxation through what are seen as primarily physical practices: postures and stretches that manipulate the body and presumably make it healthier and stronger. It is a common North American perception that these exercise programs are the full extent of yogic practices, and indeed, much of yoga in North America is oriented to practitioners who are interested in exercise. Yoga, in this elaboration, has developed into an exercise industry with a great deal of popular appeal. Therefore, we can say that yoga in North America is in part an exercise discipline.<sup>5</sup>

But in other North American interpretations, yoga moves beyond exercise and takes on other dimensions. North American students who turn to sources like Patañjali, for example, often quickly come to the conclusion that it is possible that there are other elements to yoga beyond āsanas.

At times, the “spirituality” of yoga is played up in some North American settings, which perhaps makes the practice appealing to a different set of people, likely for different reasons. For example, practitioners may see yoga as an alternative to “Western” religion, or may see it as a “spiritual” practice that has the perceived benefit of not being a “religion” whatsoever. When yoga is defined more broadly beyond posture-based exercise practice,<sup>6</sup> a network of related yoga disciplines appear: bhakti yogas, karma yogas, and seva yogas, among numerous others.

The SYVC will serve as our case study. At the SYVC, yoga draws upon various types of discipline. For example, meditation classes focus on mental discipline, āsana classes on physical discipline, cooking classes on dietary discipline, prānāyāma on breathing disciplines, and so on. In light of this, “yoga” at the SYVC has a broad and nuanced meaning. These disciplines that we see at the SYVC in Toronto are in part characteristic of their place in a North American religious world. At the same time, they draw substantially upon Indian traditions and practices as well. The various disciplines at the Centre taken together are commonly seen by practitioners as expressions of commitment to a “yogic” life. I maintain that a “yogic” life is very much framed as a “religious” practice at the SYVC. This claim is supported with my analysis of Sivanandin religious objects below. Of course, different practitioners will have differing opinions about whether the yoga they practice is “religion”, or even “spirituality”. The range of interpretations of these “spiritual” or “religious” behaviours is broad. See, for example, the work of Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe.<sup>7</sup> At the SYVC, many practitioners form an idea of a “yoga” that they would quite likely describe as a “religious” or “spiritual” practice. In part, this view will shape the ways in which this yoga is disciplinary, as will be shown below.

### *Foucault and Discipline*

Addressing yoga as “discipline” situates this study in a long academic tradition, from Franklin Edgerton to Mircea Eliade to Mark Singleton.<sup>8</sup> What differentiates my argument is that, in addition to this scholarly tradition of yoga-as-discipline, I will also be applying the word “discipline” in Foucault’s particular sense. This analytical framework will allow us to examine how yoga is also a Foucauldian discipline at the SYVC. Foucault’s writings on discipline will allow us to suggest not only what SYVC yoga is disciplining, but also how it is disciplining, and what is being produced by this discipline.



The essential characteristics of a Foucauldian concept of discipline, as described in DP, are its permeating ubiquity,<sup>9</sup> its constitution of the subject through techniques of surveillance,<sup>10</sup> normalizing judgment,<sup>11</sup> and classification;<sup>12</sup> as well as its goals of rendering the body docile and submissive to techniques of control.<sup>13</sup> For Foucault, disciplines are nuanced, modulated and socially pervasive. From his perspective, there are few, if any, social facts that we can point to that have not been “disciplined”. In this conception, discipline is a continuous, uninterrupted application of power that permeates and manipulates coextensively with the society in which it is found. It is largely unspoken and unacknowledged, but deeply felt; indeed, discipline according to Foucault shapes the constitution of the self. That is to say, the idea of an undisciplined subject is conceptually unhelpful, inaccessible, and problematically prior to discourse. More usefully, discipline shapes the self fundamentally and is constitutive of the subject. It defines, in a fundamental way, the self in modern societies. Discipline is most evidently elaborated through modern institutions such as the school, the prison, the factory, and the hospital; although its techniques permeate all manner of social interaction. I will clarify with some examples of “disciplinary” institutions below. According to Foucault, through these institutions, our disciplines shape our bodies and our self-understandings. As he says, “These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’”.<sup>14</sup> Thus for Foucault, “disciplines” are integral to the application of power in modern societies. For Foucault, modern disciplines arose in the latter half of the eighteenth century, nominally as a result of revulsion with physical torture as the predominant form of punishment, though more likely as a result of needs for new techniques of control and punishment.<sup>15</sup>

The metaphor used by Foucault in DP to express the ubiquity of modern discipline is the architecture of Jeremy Bentham’s “panopticon”.<sup>16</sup> Foucault devotes a full chapter of DP to this metaphor. Within the panopticon, all actions of the inmates are observable. The world of the panopticon is structured in such a way that discipline is constant and unavoidable. There is no place in that architecture to step outside of surveillance and control. The discipline is total, but also individualized: the panopticon’s inmates are compartmentalized, situated unquestionably in the architecture’s rigid hierarchy. For Foucault, this architecture represents an ideal image of

modern techniques of discipline: surveillance, compartmentalization and hierarchalization act to discipline the individual, and situate him or her bodily and socially. Indeed, these disciplines are constitutive of his or her social world.

To use a more common, less metaphorical example, we can consider a barracks as a disciplinary institution. In a barracks, soldiers are controlled through constant observation; the surveillance of the institution is indisputable. This surveillance makes it possible to enforce a very clear and precise regimentation: the physical space is carefully arranged; the soldier's place in that space is narrowly defined. Moreover, in the barracks, time is carefully partitioned and controlled, so that all activities take place according to a certain precise schedule. Most importantly for us, for the soldier to meet the requirements of this regimentation, the movements of his or her body must be carefully and precisely controlled. In this carceral institution, the body must know when to stand, when to rest, and when to work. The barracks has rendered the soldier docile and disciplined, and has minutely manipulated the subject.

### *Discipline and the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center*

When considering “discipline” at the SYVC from a Foucauldian perspective, we need to evaluate the application of Foucault's concept of discipline in the setting of a yoga centre. What is being disciplined at the SYVC? Is it a “religious” discipline? What do we mean by calling such a practice a “religious” discipline? For a moment, let us focus on the relationship of discipline to “religion” in Foucault's work, particularly in DP. An important question to ask is: how do religious disciplines fit into Foucault's broader notion of discipline? Foucault does not provide a complete or systematic conceptual toolkit to address religion and discipline; we therefore need to elucidate some of the concepts that we will be using.

It is helpful to think of religious practices as they are organized into “religious regimes”. I have developed this term as a tool to frame various disciplines within religious institutions. It is very loosely derived from Sarah Strauss' concept of an “oasis regime”.<sup>17</sup> I define a religious regime not as a practice, but rather as a set of practices that, taken together, constitute the practical religious life of a practitioner or devotee. It exists within its institutional elaboration, but is not coextensive with it. We can ask whether it is reasonable to think of “religious regimes” as Foucauldian

disciplines. Is a religious regime a disciplinary one? Is it disciplinary in the same sense that Foucault sees the prison, the school, the factory and the hospital as disciplinary? The question of where or how religious regimes fit within Foucault's broader notion of discipline is also important. Some commentators address this question. Jeremy Carrette, for example, situates religious disciplinary regimes alongside military and educational ones.<sup>18</sup> Joseph Rouse argues that all disciplinary acts exist within the functioning of power, because in a Foucauldian world there is no possible position "outside" of power.<sup>19</sup> Following these arguments, I maintain that a religious regime is disciplinary in Foucault's sense. As a disciplinary program, it shapes and constructs the self-understanding and practices of the devotee.

Strauss, speaking of the Sivananda tradition, situates practitioners' religious regimes outside of the power structures that otherwise control them, hence, her term "oasis regime". This concept is essential to her analysis of Sivananda yoga in her book, *Positioning Yoga* (2005). Her argument is that religious regimes can be used to step outside of the pressures of modernity.<sup>20</sup> For Strauss, practitioners can temporarily escape from the demands of their daily lives by attending a yoga class, by going on a "yoga vacation", or even by traveling to distant parts the world to receive yoga teachings. In this regard, she claims yoga acts as a release valve to the pressures of mundane modern life.

Certainly, it could be maintained that adopting a religious regime can be an active and effective technique of the practitioner to situate themselves socially. From this perspective, one's social place in the world is substantially self-determined. The religious regime can be seen as a means of coping with the contemporary world. Following this argument, if a religious regime is acting as a retreat outside of power structures, then it is not simply an additional discipline; it is an act of taking on a qualitatively different discipline. By submitting to a religious regime, one can change the configuration of disciplines that one is subject to. It could be argued that a SYVC religious regime can be a means of resistance against other disciplines. If religious regimes can be both elective and transformative, it is not a great leap to consider them alternatives and techniques of resistance. In this sense, a religious regime would be substantially different than other, presumably non-elective disciplines. This religious counter-discipline is, therefore, arguably emancipatory or liberating from other disciplines to which the devotee is subject.

It is important to be careful with the use of terminology in this examination. “Discipline” can be used in a Foucauldian sense, or, less precisely, as it has been used in yoga studies since Edgerton. The contemporary academic study of yoga largely adopts the latter usage. In this paper, I ask if Strauss’ analysis needs to be reconsidered if we use a Foucauldian understanding of “discipline” in our interpretation of SYVC practices. In part, the meanings of “discipline” that we apply to the SYVC depend how one characterizes a religious regime at the SYVC. Is it a unified, systematized disciplinary institution, like Bentham’s panopticon? Or are there multiple, varying and contested regimes that can coexist in this institution? From what I have observed, practitioners oftentimes selectively choose their practices at the SYVC. One practitioner may emphasize āsanas, another may focus on prānāyāma. If the practitioner can choose his or her regime at the SYVC, it could be argued that the practice thereby provides him or her with a degree of freedom from disciplinary structures, however those are characterized. I am not arguing that this is generalizable across other religious traditions. But perhaps the freedom to choose the elements of one’s religious regime at the SYVC is a means by which the practitioner actively chooses to constitute themselves through discipline.

In this respect, I would argue that Strauss’s position serves as a counterpoint to Foucault’s perspective on the ubiquity of discipline, although this is not her explicit intention. Strauss’ “oasis regime” model rests on assumptions that are decidedly un-Foucauldian. The “oasis regime” runs directly contrary to a Foucauldian insistence on the inescapability of power structures. Instead, according to Strauss, religious regimes when seen as “oases”, actually raise the possibility of temporary relief from modernity insofar as they foster places of release and disengagement. This is certainly an optimistic perspective on the utility of SYVC yoga regimes.

On the other hand, it is also worth explicitly considering Strauss’ oases from a Foucauldian perspective. In DP, Foucault argues that in carceral institutions, we mistake our personalized disciplines for actual freedom to choose. In this view, the supposed elective nature of religious regimes at the SYVC are only more minutely elaborated applications of power. Strauss’ yoga practitioners may, perhaps, experience their practice as a respite from modernity. However, from a Foucauldian perspective, we should question attainability of the “oasis” as a place outside of power structures. For Foucault, the actions of these yoga practitioners to secure an “oasis” may be seen as strategic maneuvering within the “microphysics”

of their disciplines, while the “oasis” itself may not be attainable. From his perspective, yoga, like other techniques of resistance, does not offer a position outside of power.

Instead, he would argue that broad power structures that we are subject to, while dynamic and constantly changing, are inescapable. Even perceived points of resistance, such as an “oasis regime” in Strauss’ sense, ineluctably form a part of the “carceral” power network. Hence, there is no possibility of an effective “oasis”. This, as Joseph Rouse observes, is because power is co-constituted by those who support and who resist it.<sup>21</sup> As Foucault says, “power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere”.<sup>22</sup> The choices of SYVC yoga practitioners may produce changes in the immediate disciplinary networks that control them socially and bodily. Yet the regimes that are practiced there are elaborations of a disciplinary apparatus that spans far beyond any individual religious practice or religious regime. Situating Foucault’s “carceral” view of religious regimes in opposition to Strauss’ “emancipatory” view is helpful in contrasting their differing perspectives on the function of religious regimes. However, if we accept Foucault’s more fully articulated views on the ubiquity of power (and its application through discipline), Strauss’ analysis only offers an optimistic, yet problematic, counterpoint.

We could say that for Foucault, practicing or promoting a religious regime in fact invests that regime with power that is characteristic of broader social structures. The priorities and imperatives of wider North American society are evinced in the practices of the SYVC. Strauss suggests that Sivananda yoga practices can be a counterweight to the stresses of modern society. Yet ironically, as Carrette and King have convincingly argued, this de-stressing ultimately facilitates the functioning of wider social power structures by making the subject malleable, docile and cooperative.<sup>23</sup> According to their analysis, “spiritualities” such as yoga, while promising respite from the pressures of modernity, ultimately reaffirm the social order. Unintentionally or not, the religious practitioner is reinforcing the social “microphysics”<sup>24</sup> of power by enforcing and submitting to religious disciplines. For Carrette and King, what are being reinforced by “spiritualities” such as yoga are capitalist and neo-liberal values.<sup>25</sup> Whether or not we agree with Carrette and King’s political analysis, SYVC practitioners are, to use the words of Swami Sivananda, finding ways to “adapt, adjust and accommodate”<sup>26</sup> to modernity. By adopting a religious regime, power is exercised through that regime. The regime therefore produces the religious knowledge that

is obtained through these practices. Through the application of power through religious discipline, certain types of knowledge are reinforced and, as Rouse observes, other “errors” or “irrationalities” are suppressed.<sup>27</sup>

For Foucault, power is inescapable. This is an important and substantial claim. But following Foucault’s argument takes us further: in this inescapable network, knowledge and subjectivity are constructed by the religious regime, just as they would be constructed by other “carceral” regimes. The self is constituted by the disciplines that maintain his/herself in the social disciplinary network. As Foucault puts it: “Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.”<sup>28</sup> If the very self is created by social disciplines, that self has limited leverage by which to shape those disciplines for its own ends. The “microphysics”<sup>29</sup> of power are elaborated in configurations that stretch far beyond the reach of the subject. The individual works within the parameters of the disciplines he or she is subject to, strategically maneuvering within constraints, and attempting to benefit (such as by trying to create “oases”) as best as they are able. The individual’s behaviours enact disciplines at the “micro” or personal level, and for Foucault, this action constitutes both the subject and the workings of the “microphysics” of power.

In Foucault’s analysis, the supposed elective nature of religious regimes hypothesized above disappears. The disciplines that manipulate the subject are found to be prior to the subject’s own sense of self. The self becomes a much more limited agent. Moreover, religious regimes become a less well-defined category, and instead blur into the broad network of disciplines that Foucault ultimately concerns himself with. The politics of such an analysis may be troublesome,<sup>30</sup> but Foucault’s chief concern in his analysis of discipline may not be political. His approach requires us to take a moment to consider the self, as it is produced in discourse. Following Foucault, the practitioner’s self is constituted by discipline. Their experience is produced by the effects of discipline on their self. As Prado puts it, this self is “a product of precisely those [disciplinary] techniques that supposedly only shape it”<sup>31</sup>. Thus, to paraphrase Prado: rather than the self being prior to discourse, the self emerges in discourse.<sup>32</sup> Or in the words of Foucault himself, “The man described for us... is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself... The soul<sup>33</sup> is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.”<sup>34</sup> One of his arguments here is that we are the prisoners of our own discourses.

To return to the SYVC, the self that is constituted by yoga disciplines is also created by those disciplines. The disciplines that are produced at the SYVC are both similar (and complementary) to those of other “carceral” institutions, and at a societal level can be seen as part of the “carceral net”. But at an individual level, SYVC yoga disciplines ultimately construct each practitioner in a unique way. This is what Foucault had in mind when he spoke of the “microphysics”<sup>35</sup> of power. Below, I will look at two SYVC disciplinary objects and practices more closely, with the intention of demonstrating how yoga discipline functions at a “micro” level.

### The Objects

The Spiritual Diary is a whip for goading the mind towards righteousness and God. If you regularly maintain this diary you will get solace, peace of mind and make quick progress in the spiritual path. Maintain a daily diary and realise the marvellous results.

| Spiritual Diary  |      |
|--|------|
| Month :  |      |
| Questions  | Date |
| 1. When did you get up from bed ?                      |      |
| 2. How many hours did you sleep ?                      |      |
| 3. How many Manas of Japa ?                            |      |
| 4. How long in Kirtan ?                                |      |
| 5. How many Pransayamas ?                              |      |
| 6. How long did you perform Asanas ?                   |      |
| 7. How long did you meditate in one Asana?             |      |
| 8. How many Gita Slokas did you read or get by heart ? |      |
| 9. How long in the company of the wise (disciples) ?   |      |
| 10. How many hours did you observe Mouna ?             |      |
| 11. How long in disinterested-selfless service ?       |      |
| 12. How much did you give in charity ?                 |      |
| 13. How many Mantras you wrote ?                       |      |

Fig. 1. Religious diary



Fig. 2. japa malā

Lastly, I intend to consider two objects that illustrate the points I made above regarding yoga and discipline. My intention is to show how these practical yoga objects can be seen in Foucauldian terms to discipline the practitioner. They are both objects that are used regularly in practice by devotees at the SYVC. The religious diary, the first portion of which is shown in fig. 1 above, is a reproduction of the religious diary that appears in the book *Sadhana: a textbook of the psychology and practice of techniques to spiritual perfection* by Swami Sivananda.<sup>1</sup> The diary is meant as a very detailed and extensive enumeration of the practitioner’s religious practices. The entries in the diary describe the devotee’s day in great detail. There are twenty-seven daily items altogether; with concerns ranging from celibacy, to chanting, to charity. In enumerating these intended practices, the diary fairly clearly presents an implied paradigm or model for an ideal day of religious practice. In this way, it contributes to the regimenting of one’s body, one’s mind, and how one’s time is spent throughout the day.

Obviously there is an agenda of observation and surveillance here, even if it is self-administered. There is a desire for radical transparency implicit in this object and its use. Disciplinary is immediately discernible in the practice that this diary implies. The enumeration of activities provides a detailed regimen for the body. In its use, we can see panopticism and control. Using the diary is disciplinary, in Foucault's sense. Interestingly, some courses at the SYVC in Toronto include maintaining the diary daily, and sharing the results with one's spiritual teachers and peers, as part of the curriculum. In this way, it is actively used as a pedagogical tool in these classes. In this regard it serves a dual function: it is a pedagogical regime as well as personal, introspective regime. Through sharing the diary, certain practices are reinforced socially. Explicitly, the diary encourages certain practices, but implicitly, as Carrette and King's analysis suggests,<sup>2</sup> other additional behaviours are reinforced.

Perhaps most importantly, through maintaining the diary earnestly, the practitioner controls him/herself directly, subjectively and personally. Maintaining the diary subjects him/herself to the implied regime with more or less intensity. The practitioner is subject to this "whip for goading the mind toward righteousness",<sup>3</sup> to greater or lesser degrees. From an emic perspective, the purpose of the diary is purity. The practitioner is intending to purify his or her life through strict regimentation. Such purification is seen as being an important step toward religious realization and emancipation from suffering in the Sivananda tradition. In this case, the process of striving for purity is, I would argue, a disciplinary one in Foucault's sense. To move toward the goal of purity, the body must be minutely regimented. Much like in the example of the barracks, the body of the devotee is subject to constant disciplinary control. Rendering the subject docile and disciplined is what allows the practitioner to advance toward the stated goal of purity.

Purity in SYVC practice is not easily obtained. To the non-practitioner or the casual practitioner, twenty-seven daily religious practices might seem excessive. The ideal is a rigorous one. It would be a rare devotee who could perfect this religious regime. But the Foucauldian discipline of the regime is not only to be found in its ideal enactment. The disciplinary nature of the regime can be felt in the person who considers taking on even a fraction of the suggested practices. A practitioner may perhaps think, "maybe I should do kirtan more often." Irrespective of whether they indeed do this kirtan, their experience is disciplined, their regime is defined, and for Foucault, their subjectivity is shaped.



Similarly, the japa mālā shown in fig. 2 can also be seen as an object of Foucauldian discipline. Indeed, there is an intimacy to this object that is comparable, but different than that of the diary. The japa mālā is meant to be kept in proximity to the body. It is intended to be in hand during chanting, and it is also intended to be worn around the neck or the wrist at other times. It therefore implies a regime that is ubiquitous throughout the day. The japa mālā is an object that has quotidian and pervasive influence through its proximity to the body. The practitioner who wears a japa mālā, or keeps it somewhere significant, or in fact uses it for japa, is subjecting himself or herself to a religious regime. The proximity of the beads to the person reminds the practitioner of his or her religious practice. Foucault would recognize these as techniques to discipline and control the body. The practitioner's yoga practice is brought to mind by looking at or touching the japa mālā beads. This constant recollection and impetus to practice is, in itself, disciplinary. The body is controlled constantly, through this minute, continuous application of discipline. The disciplinary use of the beads is pervasive, extensive and subtle, even though explicitly they may appear to only be used for japa.

My point is that these objects structure experience. For example, the religious diary is a prescriptive template for quotidian religious practice. It implies an ideal practice to which the devotee can aspire. The beads serve as a physical reminder to practice. This structuring is a very explicit formulation of a religious regime, and it contributes to the construction of a discursive religious world. The object, whether the diary, or beads, or other tools, discursively formulates Sivananda religious practice. Throughout this paper I have consistently questioned the way in which SYVC discursive practices are constructing and controlling. Looking to these objects can help us answer that question. Disciplinary objects at the SYVC, such as the two examples above, serve to construct the subjective experiences of practitioners. The self, in Foucault's sense, is disciplined through mechanisms such as those implicit in the objects above. The disciplining of the body, through objects and practices, creates the subjectivity and experience of SYVC practice. Discipline not only creates the practice, but it creates the practitioner. The disciplinary objects can therefore be seen as constructing experiences and producing discursive religious practices. These examples of objects at the SYVC are particularly illustrative of yoga as Foucauldian discipline. They point to a significant preoccupation in SYVC practice with yoga as a disciplinary religious regime. This concern can be seen in these objects in particular, but also across a broader range of practices at the SYVC.

## *Conclusion*

The recent rise of yoga in contemporary North American society is undeniable. Organizations like the SYVC have produced unique exercise innovations and religious innovations. Yoga has developed novel practices and perspectives, as well as new institutions. In our analysis of the SYVC, we should be cognizant of the modernity of yoga in North America. It is important to address the SYVC as a modern institution, and, as such, as “carceral”. It is part of the modern disciplinary network that exercises control through social institutions. These are socially elaborated in great detail: even down to a minute level, we experience the “microphysics” of power. According to Foucault, these “microphysics” dictate our subjection in elaborate detail. In his view, our disciplines are largely not elected, but are determined by a power network that fully permeates our subjectivity. Objects used in SYVC practice elaborate the application of power and construct the subjectivity of practitioners. Yoga, as a consequence, is a discipline in Foucault’s sense. Sivananda yoga creates the subject, and also subjects it. If we follow this analysis, it is decidedly not Strauss’ “oasis”.

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## *Notes*

1. Véronique Altglas, *Le nouvel hindouisme occidental* (Paris: CNRS Sociologie, 2005); Elizabeth De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004); Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe, “Spirituality and ‘Mystical Religion’ in Contemporary Society: A Case Study of British Practitioners of the Iyengar Method of Yoga,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20, no. 3 (2005); Verena Schnäbele, *Yoga in Modern Society* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2010); Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Sarah Strauss, *Positioning Yoga: Balancing Acts Across Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).
2. Franklin Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gita or Song of the Blessed One: India’s Favorite Bible* (Chicago: Open Court, 1925), 65.
3. Hasselle-Newcombe, “Spirituality and ‘Mystical Religion’”, 311-13.
4. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).
5. Singleton, *Yoga Body*.
6. De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*; for a useful typology.
7. Hasselle-Newcombe, “Spirituality and ‘Mystical Religion’”.

8. Edgerton, *The Bhagavad Gita*; Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Singleton, *Yoga Body*.
9. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 206.
10. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 170ff.
11. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 177ff.
12. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 192ff.
13. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 136-138.
14. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 137.
15. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 77-78.
16. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.
17. Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 113-114.
18. Jeremy R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 19-20.
19. Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 111.
20. Strauss, *Positioning Yoga*, 122.
21. Rouse, "Power/Knowledge", 109.
22. Quoted in Rouse, "Power/Knowledge", 109.
23. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 45.
24. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28.
25. Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 83.
26. At the SYVC, this is a commonly repeated phrase of Swami Sivananda's, and can be found in numerous sources attributed to him. ("Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate," Divine Life Society, accessed March 23, 2015, [http://sivanandaonline.org/public\\_html/?cmd=displaysection&section\\_id=376](http://sivanandaonline.org/public_html/?cmd=displaysection&section_id=376)).
27. Rouse, "Power/Knowledge", 103.
28. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 194.
29. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28.
30. Some commenters who have criticized the politics of Foucault's analysis of power include Jürgen Habermas, as cited in Thomas Flynn, 36; Richard Rorty, as cited in Rouse, 107; José Merquior, 117; and C.G. Prado, 2.
31. C.G. Prado, *Starting With Foucault* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 55.
32. Prado, *Starting With Foucault*, 55.
33. I find the choice of the word "soul" an odd one, but the point is well taken. Despite the oddness of this vocabulary, I think Foucault is deliberately and provocatively using the word "soul" to cut at the core of our perceived self-identities. He is arguing that our most fundamental selves are the products of discipline. The French word being used by Foucault is *âme*, which he is apparently drawing from the work of 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Gabriel de Mably. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 29.
34. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 30.
35. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28.
36. Swami Sivananda, *Sadhana: A Textbook of the Psychology and Practice of Techniques to Spiritual Perfection* (Uttarakhand, India: Divine Life Society, 2010). According to Swami Sadasivananda at the New York SYVC, this diary has also appeared in numerous other books by Swami Sivananda (in conversation, June 19, 2013). It has also recently been posted to the website of the Divine Life Society, which is an organization that was founded by Swami Sivananda ("Spiritual Diary," Divine Life Society, accessed August 6, 2014, [http://sivanandaonline.org/public\\_html/?cmd=di](http://sivanandaonline.org/public_html/?cmd=di)

splaysection&section\_id=1529). Finally, it has appeared on a website called Energy Enhancement Meditation, where it is attributed to Swami Sivananda, in particular to his book *Essence of Yoga*. <http://www.energyenhancement.org/sivananda/Sri-Swami-Sivananda-Essence-of-Yoga-Chapter-5-Spiritual-Sadhana-17-The-Spiritual-Diary.html> (accessed August 14, 2014). However, after reviewing a copy of *Essence of Yoga*, this attribution appears to be incorrect.

37. Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 129.

38. See fig. 1.

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