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## Tapas and the Hero(ine)'s Journey: The Inner Fire of Transformation

Stephanie Spence

Loyola Marymount University, [stephyogini@gmail.com](mailto:stephyogini@gmail.com)

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*Tapas* and the Hero(ine)'s Journey: The Inner Fire of Transformation

by

Stephanie Spence

A thesis paper presented to the

Faculty of the Department of  
Yoga Studies  
Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Yoga Studies

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## Abstract

This thesis offers an expository examination of the intersection of yoga's modern *tapas* (austerity) practice and the framework of storytelling, contrasting and comparing these two ideals, by exploring the evolution of the term *tapas* and uncovering how it is mirrored by the hero(ine)'s journey identified by Joseph Campbell and other scholars. For humanity to evolve into a higher state of self-awareness and create a world where peaceful co-existence is possible, individuals must embark on an inner journey. Through this journey, our inner world evolves, which in turn can lead to more enlightened behavior and contribute to a more harmonious global community. To address humanity's broader issues, a possible construct to guide the individual journey is at the intersection between yoga's modern *tapas* and the framework for storytelling, as I explore through developing a *tapas* experience framework, to offer a compelling transformational journey and path forward for the practitioner.

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## Introduction

“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

“All that we are is story. From the moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey; we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here. It is what we arrive with. It is all we leave behind. We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important. We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we’re here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship – we change the world, one story at a time...”

- Richard Wagamese

*Tapas* is a transitional process identified in yoga texts, scientific research, and literature which recognizes a physical, emotional, and perhaps spiritual pilgrimage. A pilgrimage intended to help an individual grow, which can often ultimately help others as well. By practicing *tapas*, a person trains themselves to face obstacles that they find challenging and build strength, confidence, and perseverance in the aspects of overcoming obstacle(s). The practitioner may discover what they initially wanted isn’t what they ultimately needed, but by having the determination and courage to embark on their own heroic journey, transformation occurs.

Inspired by the above quotes, by gathering and analyzing existing scholarship and literature, this thesis will explore the intersection of yoga’s *tapas* practice and the framework of storytelling which can be used for understanding and utilizing different aspects of yoga for embodiment of optimal living (internally and externally) while focusing on the process of personal transformation. Through looking at broader yoga traditions and the evolution of the term *tapas*,

and by examining how it mirrors the hero(ine)'s journey identified by the American mythologist Joseph Campbell, I will compare these two essential constructs.

It is prudent to refrain from positing a definitive characterization of yoga due to the multifarious and contested nature of the topic, which has engendered ongoing debates and controversies in the academic and global domains. Yoga, for the purposes of this paper, encompasses a diverse range of South Asian spiritual concepts and practices that manipulate the internal mechanics and external connections of the human self. Traditional yoga texts define yoga in various ways, generally denoting a goal rather than the practice itself, such as a state of mental and physical self-control, union with an external entity, or recognition of absolute interconnectivity. Modern yoga is a hybrid product of interactions between numerous cultural clusters. The practices of yoga have incorporated a variety of mental and physical techniques to attain goals ranging from spiritual liberation to physical perfection and health. Yoga serves as a means of both grounding and transcending the human organism, resulting in holistic well-being.

The word *tapas* refers to a type of ascetic practice or discipline that involves self-control and spiritual purification. Modern yoga's practice of *tapas* refers to the concept of discipline or austerity. It involves the use of self-discipline to overcome physical and mental obstacles and achieve a state of purification, which is believed to be indispensable for spiritual growth. This practice is often correlated with physical exertion but can also involve mental discipline. Through *tapas*, practitioners aim to cultivate a strong will and develop the ability to focus their energy on their goals.

Engaging in *tapas* can have a transformative effect on an individual, giving them the strength and willpower to achieve their goals and overcome obstacles.

Any power or discipline can be misused or taken too far. In other words, *tapas* can become an obsession or a means of control, rather than a healthy practice for personal growth. Throughout texts and history, powerful figures have twisted the concept of discipline and self-control to serve their destructive purposes. For instance, the demon Rāvaṇa in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Hitler, who infamously adopted the svastika among other symbols, misused the power of *tapas* for their own gain. Therefore, it's crucial to approach *tapas* with a positive mindset and clear intention, to avoid potential abuse or negative consequences. My focus here is on *tapas* used with a positive intention and as a means of healthy personal growth.

For the scope of this paper, without critical consideration of the social and political dimensions of yoga and other spiritual practices (the complex intersections between spirituality, politics, and social justice movements), personal transformation can be defined as a multifaceted and dynamic process that involves intentional efforts to cultivate greater self-awareness, develop new skills of competencies, adopt new perspectives, and engage in practices that promote personal growth and flourishing. The goal of personal transformation is not merely to become a “better” person, but to realize one’s full potential as an individual and cultivate deeper connections with our internal selves, others, and the world around us. The essence of OUR individual journey is a spiritual thirst which seeks wholeness. I intend to show how these two ideas (that of a journey and that of a *tapas*/yoga practice) mirror each other, by looking at their intersection.

Campbell's hero's story is a narrative pattern that depicts the journey of the hero through discriminating stages, such as the call to adventure, the road of trials, death, and the return with the elixir (unification). In some measure similar, the heroine's journey is a narrative pattern that outlines the journey of the heroine through heterogeneous stages, such as a call to action, awakening/separation, the road of trials, death, and a rebirth/healing process (integration).



Three types of journeys will be explored. The first is the hero's journey, initially determined and articulated with specificity by Campbell. The second is the heroine's journey first recognized and unambiguously described by the author Maureen Murdock and subsequently many more. Finally, I've also factored into the final *tapas experience* my fresh paradigm of a genderless journey/story.

Drawing on the framework of storytelling outlined by Campbell, I show how storytellers' extrapolative approach to life stories can be shaped by hermeneutical concerns of yoga's transformative practices (specifically, *tapas*). There is a striking breadth and orchestrated coherence to the multiple diagrams and systems that have been used to facilitate understanding our journeys. Drawing on these examples, this thesis hopes to offer a fresh and inclusive orientation that reflects the diversity of the world we live in and help to promote greater understanding and acceptance of all people. One approach to achieve this objective is by comprehending what is known in the art and craft of storytelling as the Character Arc.

In a Character Arc, the outward journey refers to the physical actions and events that a character goes through in a book, play, or movie. The intersection of this outward journey with the character's inner journey, or the emotional and psychological changes they experience, is what creates a well-rounded and believable Character Arc. This intersection is evident in how a character's actions and decisions are influenced by their inner struggles and growth. For example, a character who starts off as selfish and self-centered may go on a physical journey that forces them to confront their flaws and eventually gives rise to them becoming a more selfless and compassionate person. This confluence is what makes a character arc satisfying and meaningful for the audience.

The intersection of an inward yoga journey and an outward journey in life denotes the way in which one's practice of yoga can positively impact one's external experiences and relationships. Through the practice of yoga, which typically includes physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation, individuals can augment a strengthened realization of self-awareness and inner peace. This amplified discernment of awareness and inner peace can then be carried into one's interactions with the world, leading to more mindful and fulfilling relationships and experiences. Additionally, the physical practice of yoga can prompt improved physical health and overall well-being, which can likewise positively impact one's outward journey in life.

By using hermeneutic analysis, I examined the practice of *tapas* and its intersection with the framework of story. I gathered knowledge in books and online from various ancient yoga texts, and my private modern yoga practice. I scrutinized numerous books in my personal library, some of which were required through my university as part of my ongoing pursuit of my master's in yoga studies. Sources came from different eras, countries, and authorities throughout time in the art and craft of storytelling. I also garnered books related to psychology, yoga psychology, behavior change, and a person's quest for wholeness. I accumulated sources that illustrate how *tapas*, the hero(ine)'s journey, and the framework of story could be utilized to illustrate a contemporary interpretation of how a hypothetical *tapas* experience could take a *tapasvin* (a practitioner of *tapas*) on a *sādhana* (quest) of personal transformation. Finally, I appraised copious books from my personal library, a selection of which were required through my university that I was active in concurrently with studying creative writing, playwriting, screenwriting, literature, and personal historical narrative writing. All of these were significant in forming the idea for utilizing *tapas* as the cornerstone of this thesis.

While there are other unique contributions from the ancient texts of yoga and the craft of screenwriting, this original exploration of the intersection of the practice of *tapas* and storytelling was inspired by an assignment as part of the curriculum for my Masters of Yoga Studies degree from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California. Campbell's twelve-step hero's journey is simply a jumping off point to begin the process of crossing over to a *tapas* journey. Ultimately, I reframed the hero(ine)'s journey of self-transformation. Specifically, I created a *tapas experience* by layering over aspects of the hero's journey, the heroine's journey, the framework of the art and craft of storytelling, and Dara Marks Transformational Arc.

Our life story, the inevitable challenges through life, and the use of *tapas* as a tool for transformation are paramount for comprehending ourselves deeply as spiritual beings while cultivating self-awareness and personal growth. At a time of significant metamorphosis on our planet, it is more pertinent now than ever before to help a heterogeneous audience foster the developing growth of their consciousness.

This thesis investigates the convergence of the *tapas* practice of yoga and the storytelling framework. The goal is to facilitate comprehension and application of various facets of yoga, ultimately leading to optimal internal and external living. The emphasis is on the process of personal transformation through utilizing the teachings and lessons derived from the convergence.

My hypothesis centers on the idea that if humanity is to evolve into a higher state of self-awareness, making the world a place where peaceful co-existence is possible, we each need to embark on an inward journey – individually. Along this journey our inner world evolves, and our outer world behavior may enable a more global peaceful co-existence.

A lofty goal I know, but worth it just the same.

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I would like to acknowledge the ancient texts that I used were not only translated by different people, but the commentaries were also unique to the time and place of its commentators. Although the critical thinking and commentary that I present is nuanced by my over forty-two years of practicing yoga, it is my personal views and opinions that have helped me identify and refine my opinions. My views and opinions are also shaped by the neoliberal and capitalist western modern yoga that exists here in the United States. I read and analyzed the texts and resources used through my cis gendered, Caucasian, Buddhist, feminist post-modern self-identifying champion of the ancient science of this tool of transcendence, the yoga of my understanding, but I understand that I may have biases. I applied the filters of living in this time and in this place. This has all helped me develop my ideas about issues of social justice, freedom from suffering, and co-existing in a peaceful world which contributes to the underlying themes of this paper. It goes without saying that rectification, comments, criticism, current research or relevant data, and any useful information that someone reading this thesis may be able to contribute will be gratefully received.

## **The Story of *tapas***

### **Tracing the Historical Path of the Word *tapas* Since the *R̥g Veda***

The word *tapas*, in the Indo-European refined language of Sanskrit, refers to a type of ascetic practice or discipline that involves self-control and spiritual purification. The word is first found in the *Vedas*, the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism. While it is true that the *R̥g Veda* has many themes such as existence, non-existence, sacrifice, cosmic order, truth, and ascetic heat, my thesis is on *tapas* – specifically, the intersection of *tapas* practice with Modern Yoga and the framework of storytelling.

Spiritual practice, heat, asceticism, meditation, determination, and self-transformation: these will all be themes traced in this thesis. Starting with the first known uses of the word *tapas*, the story begins with the concept of ritual fire. What was in vogue in the Vedic period (1500 – 500 B.C.E) among elite religious circles was a unique act of fire sacrifice known as *yajña*.

Later, the fire of the external Vedic *yajña* (sacrifice) transformed into the fire of conscious restraint or *tapas*.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves...

In the hymns of the *Rg Veda*, the oldest of the *Vedas*, in *Creation Hymn (Nāsadiya)* (10.129) Doniger writes that this hymn is “meant to puzzle and challenge, to raise unanswerable questions, to pile up paradoxes.”<sup>1</sup> As there was “no distinguishing sign of night nor day”<sup>2</sup> [in the beginning] and “nothing beyond”<sup>3</sup> it, life force is finally mentioned (the one “covered in emptiness”<sup>4</sup>) as “that one arose through the power of heat.”<sup>5</sup> Doniger notes that “*Tapas* designates heat, in particular the heat generated by ritual activity and by physical mortification of the body.”<sup>6</sup> And in (10.190) *Cosmic Heat* “Order and truth were born from heat as it blazed up. From that was born night; from the heat was born the billowy ocean.”<sup>7</sup> Although yoga isn't mentioned in the *Vedas*, *tapas* does play an important part in the oldest sacred text and there is no better place to begin an important story than in Creation.

Doniger notes that “*Tapas*, the heat produced by the ritual activity of the priest, is equated with the primeval erotic or ascetic heat of the Creator.”<sup>8</sup> The performance of offering sacred

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Rig Veda*, (Penguin Books, London, England 1981), 25.

<sup>2</sup> O'Flaherty, 25.

<sup>3</sup> O'Flaherty, 25.

<sup>4</sup> O'Flaherty, 25.

<sup>5</sup> O'Flaherty, 25.

<sup>6</sup> O'Flaherty, 26.

<sup>7</sup> O'Flaherty, 34.

<sup>8</sup> O'Flaherty, 34.

substances into a ritual fire had its origins in this creation narrative (*Rg Veda* 10.90). As he presented his body to the flames, everything arose from out of his sacrificed limbs. Our incredible universe of beings came about by this body broken, distributed, and connected through fire. In ritual performance the *brahmins* (priests) continued to reenact the original sacrifice of *puruṣa*. In the later part of the Vedic period, *yajña* (sacrifice) developed into an internal bodily sacrifice.

Creation stories (as this one described in the *Rg Veda*) are incredibly important to every culture. Creation stories are important because they provide an explanation for the origin of the world and the people in it. They also serve as a foundation for cultural beliefs, values, and practices. Additionally, they can provide a sense of identity and continuity for a community, and they can also be used to teach moral or ethical lessons. In many cultures, creation stories also play a significant role in religious or spiritual beliefs. The key word here is story.

The mythology of Hinduism holds significant cultural and religious significance within the Hindu community, serving as an integral component of their identity and worldview. India gave the world the great gift of yoga. The more that science comes to understand what some of the ancient texts have been telling us all along: that there is essentially one brain, that we are all one, and that our vibrational intelligence is the key to unlocking our limitless co-creative capacities we can no longer ignore that many belief systems in science (especially that of Darwin's theory) have been disproved. But the *Upaniṣads* say, *tat tvam asi*, "You are that" and *so'ham asmi*, or "I am that." By looking back, could this be directing us to finally experience ourselves as being one with all that is, One with the Divine?

Quantum mechanics states that everything is a vibration of light, constantly fluctuating between wave and particle. If consciousness connects us with all surrounding energy fields, then we also have infinite thought possibilities throughout the universe. In using ancient wisdom

combined with modern wisdom, what tools do we have to align with and enter resonance with the fundamental vibrational field in which we all dwell? This insight is in alignment with my thesis which proposes that we understand a practice using *tapas* (and a parallel guide of the framework of storytelling) to align in a way that brings peace to our lives and ultimately to our world.

In some of the later Vedic texts, such as the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas*, and the *Upaniṣads* the concept of *tapas* becomes more developed and is linked with the idea of spiritual purification. Chapple writes in *Karma and Creativity*, though, that the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* “tells a story of creation which, similar to Vedic accounts, links the emergence of world order with the performance of *tapas*.”<sup>9</sup> Chapple continues, “The act of creation through this process may be read both as a cosmogonic myth and as a symbol of creative power in a person.”<sup>10</sup> The *Brāhmaṇas* also associate *tapas* with the performance of religious rituals and the attainment of spiritual power; also explaining their meaning and purpose. In the *Āraṇyakas*, *tapas* is seen as a means of attaining spiritual power, liberation and immortality, and is also associated with yoga, self-control and knowledge.

In the context of the *Upaniṣads*, *tapas* generally refers to the practice of austerities or self-discipline as a mechanism for purifying the mind and body with the goal of attaining spiritual knowledge or realization. According to Robert Ernest Hume’s book *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, *tapas* is often defined in the *Upaniṣads* as a form of asceticism which is a preliminary to instruction in sacred knowledge and part of the “desire to understand Brahma.”<sup>11</sup> Asceticism also comprises various practices such as fasting, celibacy, and physical mortification. These

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Chapple, *Karma and Creativity*, (State University of New York Press, 1986), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Chapple, *Karma and Creativity*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, (Oxford University Press, 1971), 290.

practices are acknowledged as a means of controlling the senses, overcoming desires, and focusing the mind on spiritual goals.

However, it is essential to note that *tapas* is not limited to external practices alone. In some *Upaniṣads*, it is also identified as an internal fire or energy that burns within the individual, driving them towards spiritual growth and realization. In this sense, *tapas* can be interpreted as the inner flame of motivation and dedication that drives the seeker on the path of spiritual evolution.

*Tapas* is a discipline that involves the withdrawal of the senses and the cultivation of a focused and concentrated mind. Through *tapas*, one can govern the mind and triumph over the distractions of the world, thus allowing for the attainment of spiritual knowledge and liberation. The *Upaniṣads* also portray *tapas* as a form of self-sacrifice or offering, where one gives up something of value to achieve a higher goal.

In the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*, these teachings not only inspire and educate but are a form of story. When an individual reads what is possible, they place themselves in the position of one who has the opportunity to take in the text and apply it to their own life. In addition to story, though, Vedic texts, like the *Ṛg Veda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Sāmaveda*, and the *Atharvaveda* contain a variety of different literary forms, including hymns, prayers, mantras, and liturgical formulas. These texts are also rich in myths that illustrate the beliefs and worldview of the ancient Vedic people.

As we have seen already, certain stories found in the Vedic texts are cosmogonic in nature and elucidate the creation of the world and the origins of the gods and goddesses. Other stories found in the Vedic texts pertain to the adventures and battles of the gods and goddesses, such as the story of the conflict between the gods and demons in the *Ṛg Veda*. These stories often include themes of victory over chaos and the establishment of cosmic order. Additionally, the Vedic texts



include narratives regarding the lives of human sages and seers, such as the story of the sage Agastya in the *R̥g Veda*, who is acclaimed for his asceticism and wisdom.

The stories in the Vedic texts were passed down orally and were recited in ritual contexts and served a didactic function teaching religious moral lessons, and to transmit the tradition and culture to the next generation. These are stories and myths that illustrate the beliefs and worldview of the ancient Vedic people, yet we are still gaining knowledge from them. They provide us with a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and beliefs of the ancient Indian civilization. These narratives also provide insight into the linguistic development, human-environment interactions, and the impact of the ancient civilization on the environment, and a source of inspiration for Indian literature and culture. It is crucial to look at all aspects of this period while seeing how looking backward, we can appreciate and not appropriate.

In the Hindu tradition, the stories examined here are considered to have really happened at specific times (with much creativity to make it a compelling tale). And although science may generally only accept what there is hard evidence for, there is a measure of evidence that the people in the stories are considered to have lived. “The historicity and factual veracity of a myth is irrelevant, as long as people believe in it.”<sup>12</sup> With the enduring popularity and longevity of these tales, we still care. And what we truly care about is the deeper lessons. They matter. They show us we matter. Our story. Our place in the world. “The psychological function of mythology puts us in accord with the inevitable arc of aging that we all traverse. From birth, infancy, childhood, adolescences, maturity, old age, and death, we each have to come to terms with who we are, how we change with time, and how our roles in society and within our family also change. We look to the stories of our culture to give us the understanding we need to make sense of our changing

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<sup>12</sup> Bernie Clark, *From the Gita to the Grail: Exploring Yoga Stories & Western Myths*, (Indianapolis, Blue River Press, 2014), 114-115.

roles.”<sup>13</sup> Having faith in and placing trust in narratives (comprised of a wide range of characters, from legendary heroes to ordinary individuals – globally) constitutes a fundamental aspect of our social and personal constitution. Stories are a part of not only what we look to, but what we hold dearly.

In the post-Vedic texts like the Epics (*Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), *Purāṇas* and other *Dharmaśāstra* texts, the word *tapas* refers to austerities or penances that one performs to gain blessings or boons or to please the deity. The Epics are steeped in mythology. Inside the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rama is often shown engaging in *tapas* as a means of developing his character and achieving spiritual purity. There are also references to the importance of *tapas* for spiritual attainment and for overcoming obstacles. Also, in the *Mahābhārata* is the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which is important as it relates to *tapas* and yoga. In the *Gītā*, *tapas* is mentioned as a means of purifying the mind and developing spiritual discipline.

In the *Purāṇas*, the texts tell the stories of the gods and goddesses and their interactions with the world. They often include teachings on ethics and spirituality, including the importance of *tapas* as a means of spiritual purification and transformation. In the *Dharmaśāstra*, the texts emphasize the importance of *tapas* as a means of purifying the mind, developing spiritual discipline, and achieving spiritual liberation.

All these works offer deep wisdom and profound messages. From its beginning in the *Vedas*, starting in creation through its evolution from a practice associated with self-control and asceticism, to one that is linked with spiritual purification and the attainment of knowledge and power *tapas* has a rich history and its own story.

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<sup>13</sup> Clark, 124.

Moving forward in time, the next most significant shift in the story of *tapas* is that it becomes firmly grounded in the five *niyamas* (observances), in *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra*, which are considered essential for the spiritual development of a practitioner of yoga. The practice of *tapas* helps to create a foundation of mental and physical discipline that is necessary for advanced spiritual practices.

Advanced asceticism doesn't mean self-torture. In Georg Feuerstein's tome, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, he explains that.

“...the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (7.5f.) speaks against exaggerated asceticism, which springs from ostentation (*damba*) and selfishness (*kamkara*) and which ignores the fact that the Lord (*īśvara*) resides within the body. According to this scripture (17.14ff.), *tapas* is three-fold: (1) *shārīra-tapas*, or ‘bodily austerity,’ consisting of reverence (*pūjana*) for the deities, the ‘twice-born’ (*dvija*), the teachers, and the sages, and comprising purity (*sauca*), recitude (*ārjava*), chastity (*bramacarya*), and nonharming (*ahimsā*); (2) *van-maya-tapas*, or ‘vocal austerity,’ consisting of speech that does not cause disquiet and that is truthful, kind, and pleasing, as well as study (*svādhyāya*); and (3) *mānasa-tapas*, or ‘mental austerity,’ consisting of serenity (*prasāda*), friendliness (*saumy-atva*), silence (*mauna*), self-restraint (*ātma-vinighraha*), and purity of feeling (*bāva-samshuddi*). These kind of *tapas* are *sāttvika*. [virtuous internal] When asceticism becomes tinged with ostentation or the desire to win honor or fame, however, it is *rājasa* [unclean].”<sup>14</sup>

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is part of the ancient Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata*, which is estimated to have been written between the 5th and 2nd centuries BCE, and will be highlighted more as it relates to storytelling later in this paper.

Mircea Eliade writes in his well-known book *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* that “One can gain nothing without acting (*kriyā*) and without practicing asceticism (*tapas*) – this is a leitmotiv of yogic literature.”<sup>15</sup> Eliade explains that according to the *Bhagavad Gītā*, asceticism or *tapas* involves enduring opposing desires and conditions. Eliade elucidates that psychic purification, according to Patañjali, allows one to “obtain *ekāgratā* - that is, authority over the

<sup>14</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *The Encyclopedia of Yoga and Tantra*, (Shambhala, 2022), 371.

<sup>15</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* Princeton, (University Press, 2009. Original, 1958.), 39.

senses and ability to know the soul and that *tapas* removes impurities and establishes a new power over the senses – that is, the possibility of passing beyond their limits (clairvoyance, clairaudience, mind reading, etc.) or of suppressing them at will.”<sup>16</sup>

Indian mythology and religious folklore depict gods and mortals being reduced to ashes by the immense power of an ascetic’s *tapas*. Ascetic practices were particularly advanced in India, and the notion of *tapas* was surrounded by a complex ideology. *Tapas* was integrated into yogic practice and was not limited to only ascetics and estatics. The soma sacrifice involved *dīkṣā*, a consecration ritual that included fasting, ascetic vigil, silent meditation, and *tapas*. The heat generated by *tapas* could also be achieved through breath control, which allowed yogic techniques to be assimilated with orthodox Brāhmanic methods. Eliade writes, “Sacrifice was early assimilated to *tapas*. ‘The gods gained their divine rank through austerity. For *tapas*, too, is a sacrifice.’”<sup>17</sup>

Eliade continues, “Mastery of fire and inner heat are always connected with reaching a particular ecstatic state or, on other cultural levels, with reaching an unconditioned state, a state of perfect spiritual freedom.”<sup>18</sup> Most people fear the intense *rage* and *heat* that comes from an excessive increase in power. This kind of raw power is mainly sought after by magicians and warriors, while those who seek balance and peace reject it. The term *śānti* denotes tranquility, absence of passion, and relief from suffering, and it comes from the Sanskrit root *śam* which originally meant extinguishing the anger, fever, and fire generated by demonic powers. The Vedic practitioners understood the danger of magic and avoided the temptation of excessive power, just as *yogins* must resist the temptation of miraculous powers.

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<sup>16</sup> Eliade, 52.

<sup>17</sup> Eliade, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Eliade, 332.

A part of yoga has been the practice of breath retention to generate inner heat since its inception. The Vedic period already recognized *tapas*, and respiratory discipline was used by *vrātyas*, a group of enigmatic ecstasies. It is challenging to determine the origin of *prāṇāyāma*, but some speculate that the rhythmic regulation of breathing resulted from mystical experiments aimed at enhancing inner heat. Sir James Mallinson and Mark Singleton, in their book *Roots of Yoga*, indicate that *tapas* is

“a necessary preliminary for yoga practice in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra and one of yoga’s key practices, *prāṇāyāma* (‘breath-control’) has long been identified as *tapas* (e.g. *Mānavadharmasāstra*). Extreme physical methods of *tapas*, such as the ancient *ūrdhvbāhu* (‘raised arm’) austerity... appear to derive from some of the early Śramaṇa methods, and the word *haṭha* itself has overt connotations of asceticism.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the *Bhagavad Gītā* was written before Patanjali’s *Yoga Sūtras*, it’s interesting to note the similarities and differences given that they could have been in existence 700 years apart. It’s important to note that these are rough estimates, and the exact dates of composition of these texts are still the subject of some debate among scholars.

The concept of *tapas* in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* is similar, but there are some differences in how it is described and used in each text. Broadly speaking, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *tapas* is described as an inner discipline or spiritual heat generated through austerities, meditation, and devotion to god. In the *Yoga Sūtras*, *tapas* is defined as a burning effort toward discipline, transformation, and purification. It involves using physical and mental effort to transform negative tendencies and habits into positive ones, and to cultivate qualities such as self-discipline, self-awareness, and spiritual purity. This becomes more relevant to this thesis as the *Yoga Sūtra* places more emphasis on the practical application of *tapas* in everyday life, as part of the overall practice of yoga.

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<sup>19</sup> Sir James Mallinson and Mark Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*, (Penguin Books, 2017) xiv-xv.

The *Yoga Sūtras* of *Patañjali* (a collection of 196 aphorisms that outlines the philosophy and practices of yoga) is estimated to have been written around 400 CE. Christopher Chapple, in *Yoga and the Luminous*, writes that “the *Yoga Sūtra* offers three main Yogas... the third of which is most commonly identified with Patañjali, eightfold Yoga, which includes the familiar ‘stages’ of ethics (*yama*, and *niyama*), movement (*āsana*), breath control (*prāṇayāma*), inwardness (*pratyāhāra*), and interior Yoga (*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*).”<sup>20</sup> “Ethics plays a central, foundational role in the eightfold path outlined by Patañjali.”<sup>21</sup> *Yoga Sūtra* II.32 states that “Purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and dedication to Īśvara are the observances.”<sup>22</sup> Although *tapas* is first defined in *Yoga Sūtra*, II.1 as part of Kriyā Yoga, II.32 delineates it as an observance. In *Yoga Sūtra* II.43, though, the reader learns its importance: “From austerity arises the destruction of impurity and the perfection of the body and the senses.”<sup>23</sup>

Sri Swami Satchidananda’s translation and commentary in his book *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* (first written in 1978) explains that in *Yoga Sūtra* II.1 “*Tapas* means ‘to burn or create heat’ [and that] anything burned out will be purified. *Tapas* also refers to self-discipline. Normally the mind is like a wild horse tied to a chariot (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.3-6 and 12.61).”<sup>24</sup> Translated by Olivelle in *The Early Upaniṣads*, the verses he is referring to say, “Know the self as a rider in a chariot, and the body, as simply the chariot. Know the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind, as simply the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses, and sense objects are the paths around them; He who is linked to the body (*atman*), senses, and mind, the wise proclaim as the one who

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Key Chapple, *Yoga and the Luminous: Patañjali’s Spiritual Path to Freedom*, (State University of New York Press, 2008), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Chapple, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Chapple, 125.

<sup>23</sup> Chapple, 126.

<sup>24</sup> Sri Swami Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Originally published under the title *Integral Yoga: The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Satchidananda Ashram (Yogaville; Integral Yoga Publications, 1978, 1984, 1990) 79-80.

enjoys.”<sup>25</sup> Swami Satchidananda continues: “If the horses are allowed to gallop without reins and charioteer, the journey will not be safe for the passenger. Although control of the senses and organs often seems to bring pain in the beginning, it eventually ends in happiness. If *tapas* is understood in this light, we will look forward to pain; we will even thank people who cause it, since they are giving us the opportunity to steady our mind and burn out impurities.”<sup>26</sup>

What does it mean that the self is the rider? Adamson and Ganeri write that “Strictly speaking, the self is the source of neither action nor will. It stands still, observing itself as it watches, as it hears and thinks. It is not merely the one who sees, nor the one who decides to look, but the one who is aware of seeing, of looking.”<sup>27</sup> Gerald James Larson writes in *Classical Sāṃkhya* that “intelligence (*buddhi*)... [is] known as the charioteer, while the thought-organ (*manas*) is the reins. [Joining the] Self, the senses, and the thought-organ the wise call the Enjoyer (*bhokṭṛ*).”<sup>28</sup> Sounds like enjoying the ride could be counterintuitive to the challenging practice of *tapas*, or is this the role of the ego (*ahaṃkāra*)?

Christopher Chapple describes *ahaṃkāra* in *Karma and Creativity* as “sense-of-self.”<sup>29</sup> Chapple writes that “the emergency of things takes place through the coming together of witness and activity, *puruṣa* and *prakṛiti*, and one gets swept away in an endless stream of thoughts and action. However, this can be brought into check by the practice of yoga in which the mind no longer binds one through its cognitive obsessions but is used as a tool.”<sup>30</sup> In Sāṃkhya/Yoga, the *puruṣa* is just the witness and doesn't drive anything.

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<sup>25</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Lipamsads: Annotated Text and Translation*, (South Asia Research, Scholar's Edition, Oxford Press, 1998), 389.

<sup>26</sup> Sri Swami Satchidananda, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, 79-80.

<sup>27</sup> Gerald James Larsen, *Classical Samkhya: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning*, (Santa Barbara, Ross/Erikson, 1979), 34.

<sup>28</sup> Larsen, 97.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Chapple, *Karma and Creativity*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Chapple, 34.

Sāṃkhya philosophy and yoga share a common goal of attaining liberation through self-realization and self-knowledge. Yoga (according to the *Yoga Sūtra* at least), like Sāṃkhya, is dualistic, and has the aim of separation (*kaivalya*) of *puruṣa* from *prakṛiti*. And the *tapas* spoken of in the *Yoga Sūtra* is part of this system.

This is, of course, very different than storytelling where one needs an ego to tell a captivating story in this context. Here, ego refers to the individual's sense of self-identity and attachment to the material world. It is the sense of "I" or "me" that keeps us bound to the cycle of *saṃsāra*. With the practice of *tapas*, we want to end the illusion created by the ego because the ego can create a false sense of identity based on external factors such as material possessions, social status, and relationships, which leads to attachment, suffering, and bondage. Instead, we can work on realizing that the ego is NOT the self, but part of *prakṛiti*, and instead cultivate the witness-consciousness of the *puruṣa*, the detached seer (*draṣṭṛ*), or "rider" spoken of in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*.

Storytelling, especially in the context of myth and literature, often deals with the themes of ego and separation and how they relate to the human condition. In many traditional stories and myths, the hero's journey involves a process of overcoming the limitations of the ego and achieving a state of unity or wholeness. This search for wholeness is an important tenant to this thesis. This is more in line with the Advaitic aim of the oneness of *ātman* and *brahman*, which has become increasingly a part of the way yoga is understood. For example, in the *Mahābhārata*, the hero Arjuna goes through a crisis of identity and ego when faced with the prospect of fighting and killing his own relatives. He turns to the god Kṛṣṇa for counsel and acquires knowledge pertaining to the concept of detachment (*vairāgya*), which helps him overcome his ego and fulfill his duty as a warrior.



It is important to note here that in contemporary literature, stories often explore the intersectional aspects of ego and the relationship between it and social identities such as race, gender, and class. Stories can challenge the dominant narratives and expose the ways in which ego-driven behaviors and attitudes perpetuate inequality and social injustice. By examining the stories we tell ourselves and others, we can become more aware of the ways in which ego and separation operate in our lives and society. We can also use storytelling as a tool to explore and transcend our ego-driven limitations and forge a connection with a deeper sense of shared humanity and oneness.

Paramahansa Yogananda wrote in his most illustrious book *Autobiography of a Yogi* that his guru, Sri Yukteswar, emphasized the importance of *tapas* in the practice of yoga. Yogananda describes Yukteswar's encounter with a famous *Sohong* Swami yogi who tells him about the importance of *tapas* in the path of yoga. Sri Yukteswar later reinforces this message, telling Yogananda that the purpose of yoga is to make us uncomfortable. "Pain and pleasure are transitory; endure all dualities with calmness, trying at the same time to remove yourself beyond their power."<sup>31</sup> Transformation can be achieved through experiencing discomfort. The practice of *tapas* extends beyond the mat and into one's everyday life. By subjecting oneself to challenges through *tapas*, change can be self-generated rather than being a result of external circumstances. Purposefully subjecting oneself to a challenge can lead to a more fulfilling life experience, as opposed to waiting for changes to happen passively. Yogananda also writes that Yukteswar said "Wisdom is not assimilated with the eyes, but with the atoms. When your conviction of a truth is

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<sup>31</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Self-Realization Fellowship, 1998, original printing 1946), 135.

not merely in your brain but in your being, you may diffidently vouch for its meaning.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, the inspiration for this thesis.

Mallinson and Singleton, in *Roots of Yoga*, write about the accumulation of *tapas* “...from at least the time of the Buddha until the present day, yoga-practicing Indian ascetics have sought to acquire *tapas* by holding difficult physical postures for long periods.”<sup>33</sup> Growth only happens when there is change. Dara Marks writes in *Inside Story*: “There is no condition of stasis in nature. Every living thing is either moving toward growth, change, and development or it has begun to decay and die.”<sup>34</sup> You’re either growing or decaying. As it relates specifically to the point of this thesis, Marks tells us that “A great story will always have its roots in this elemental question of life and death. This is the universal common denominator found in the human experience.”<sup>35</sup> By intentionally challenging ourselves through *tapas*, along with the framework of storytelling, we can create fertile ground for transformation. We can add wood to the fire. *Tapas* seems to be the key to adding wood to the fire – putting yourself into the bardo (as the Buddhist Tibetans call it). Rinpoche and Tworkov write, “an expression for deliberately increasing the challenges of maintaining a steady mind [which] deliberately brings difficult situations to the forefront so that we can work with them directly.”<sup>36</sup> It is a gift. It can be a way to effect change for yourself. To appoint yourself the charioteer of your chariot. Your life will then be proactive instead of reactive. You are driving the chariot, you are not simply reacting to life but are the driving force creating your life. While eventually the goal is to become the detached rider, the observer, along the way, one first needs to develop discernment, which is the role of the *buddhi*, the intellect, the charioteer.

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<sup>32</sup> Yogananda, 149.

<sup>33</sup> Mallinson and Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Marks, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche and Helen Tworkov, *In Love with The World: A Monk’s Journey Through the Bardos of Living and Dying* (Random House, 2021) 5.

To master this, practice *tapas*. Regularly. “To make yourself a better person is to make the world a better place. Nothing is more essential for the twenty-first century and beyond than personal transformation. It’s our only hope. Transforming ourselves is transforming the world.”<sup>37</sup>

Anya Foxen and Christa Kuberry have much to say about *tapas* in their book *Is This Yoga?* The authors write that “...the yoga of doing is what has often provided the toolkit for transitioning from going to knowing. The yoga of doing can be external, such as holding the body in a specific position or surrounding oneself with five fires in the heat of high noon, usually for the purpose of creating an uncomfortable environment for the body to generate a kind of thermal energy from the resulting exertion (this is one meaning of *tapas*). The yoga of doing can also be internal.”<sup>38</sup> The idea of doing, of action (*karma*), is found throughout most of the traditions of yoga and is a critical key in the upcoming *tapas* and story intersection.

Energy plays a central role in the practice of *tapas*, as it is through the cultivation and channeling of this vital force that practitioners can overcome challenges and achieve their goals. Whether through the practice of rigorous physical postures or the focused concentration of meditation, the aim of *tapas* is to cultivate the inner fire of energy and use it to transform the self and the world around us. “Heat is, above all, energy, or power... And so... *tapas* can also result in some very creative worldly outcomes. The entire third section of the *Yoga Sūtras* is devoted to a discussion of *vibhūti*, which basically amounts to an impressive list of superpowers. These include everything from making oneself infinitely small or large, flight, and knowing (as well as influencing) the mind of others. Such powers are in fact perfectly consistent with... the overall

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<sup>37</sup> Rinpoche and Tworikov, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Anya Foxen and Christa Kuberry, *Is This Yoga?: Concepts, Histories, and the Complexities of Modern Practice*. (Routledge 2021), 12.

vision of the world upon which the *Yoga Sūtras* (and by extension Sāṃkhya philosophy) rely.”<sup>39</sup>

But are we still hoping for superpowers?

Mark Singleton writes in *Yoga in the Modern World* that “A connection between Vedic and post-Vedic accounts of *tapas* and the Ashtanga Yoga method is evident in texts published by Pattabhi Jois and several of his pupils. Jois cites the *Yogasūtra* (2.43) to define [this] process of developing strength, which in turn leads to knowledge via the control of the mind and sense organs in terms of *tapas*.”<sup>40</sup> This shift in acceptance from *tapas* being viewed as an austerity to something of power is clear in Jois’ writings. Singleton takes us into a more modern view of yoga as a source of power which could be “...argued to be consistent with athleticism and physical fitness. In other words, physical fitness can arguably be subsumed under the rubric of *tapas*.”<sup>41</sup>

*Tapas* is also viewed as a means of purifying the body and mind so that the practitioner can progress towards the goal of yoga, which is the realization of the true nature of the self. By embracing the principles of *tapas*, a practitioner can strive towards a more harmonious and fulfilled life, both on and off the yoga mat.

The emergence of *haṭha yoga* represented a major shift in the thinking and practice of yoga worldwide. Prior to the development of *haṭha yoga*, yoga was primarily focused on meditation, spiritual discipline, and the attainment of spiritual liberation. While physical postures were a part of yoga, they were mainly seen as a means of preparing the body for meditation, rather than as an end in themselves.

With the emergence of *haṭha yoga*, however, physical postures and breathing techniques became a central focus of yoga practice. *Haṭha yoga* placed a strong emphasis on the physical

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<sup>39</sup> Foxen and Kuberry, 110-111.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Singleton and Jean Byrne, *Yoga in the Modern World: Contemporary Perspectives*, (Routledge Hindu Studies Series Routledge: 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2008),144.

<sup>41</sup> Singleton and Byrne, 175.

body and its development, as well as on the regulation of breath and the cultivation of mental focus and concentration. *Haṭha yoga* also introduced new practices, such as *bandhas* (energetic locks) and *mudrās* (gestures), which were designed to enhance the flow of energy in the body and promote physical and mental well-being.

Once *haṭha yoga* became popular in the fifteenth century, *tapas* became a prominent aspect of the practice. Practitioners were encouraged to push themselves to their limits and to maintain their postures for extended periods of time. This required a significant amount of mental and physical discipline, which was considered an essential aspect of the practice, and the practice of voluntarily subjecting oneself to discomfort, austerity, or hardship in order to develop one's willpower and character were embraced. It also began to encompass a wider range of practices, such as meditation, fasting, and self-reflection. These practices were designed to help practitioners develop greater self-awareness and self-control, and to cultivate a deeper understanding of their inner nature.

If more proof is needed beyond descriptions of *tapas* practice results including “destruction of impurity and the perfection of the body and the senses”<sup>42</sup> one may ask for an external day-to-day life-enhancing reason to practice *tapas*. So, let us now examine afflictions. B.K.S. Iyengar writes in *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* that “Not only do *yama* and *niyama* help to minimize and uproot them; they are also the firm foundation of spiritual experience. They are the ethical disciplines which show us what must be done and what must be discarded. Sooner or later, improper use of words, impure thoughts and wrong actions result in pain. Pain may be self-inflicted (*ādhyātmika*), due to fate or heredity (*ādhidaivika*), or to imbalance of elements in the body (*ādhibhautika*). It may be caused by lust, anger or greed, indulged in directly, by provocation or

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<sup>42</sup> Chapple, *Yoga and Luminous*, 126.

by compliancy.”<sup>43</sup> Patañjali suggests *tapas* as one method to be followed to speed progress to minimize and uproot afflictions. Iyengar continues, emphasizing that “...*yama* and *niyama* are not only the foundation of yoga, but the reflection of our success or failure at its higher levels.”<sup>44</sup> This is a solid reason to embark on a personal quest, a *tapas* journey.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *tapas* continues to be an important aspect of yoga practice. Many modern yoga styles, including Ashtanga, emphasize physical challenges and endurance as a means of cultivating mental and physical discipline. At the same time, many modern yoga practitioners have also embraced more introspective practices, such as mindfulness meditation, as a way of cultivating greater self-awareness and inner peace. Overall, the history of *tapas* in yoga reflects the enduring importance of discipline, perseverance, and self-control in the pursuit of spiritual growth and self-transformation.

What if we could combine all the best aspects of the practice of *tapas*, the *Yoga Sūtras*, the framework of story, and the hero(ine)’s journey to embark on our own great journey? B.K.S. Iyengar writes in his book *Core of the Yoga Sūtras* that “the word *sādhana* is often translated as ‘quest’. The term ‘quest’ conveys the idea of a long and arduous search and investigation through practice (*sādhana*).”<sup>45</sup> Our search for wholeness, perhaps a principle driving force for change and a profound reason to go on a journey (quest), is unique to each of us but “Patañjali says that *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* together constitute *antaranga sādhanā* as an integrated whole (*antaraṅga samyama*). *Samyama* is when the intellect of the head and the intelligence of the heart are united as one.”<sup>46</sup> There are levels of *samyama* [that] are a “process of integrating one’s lifestyle

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<sup>43</sup> B.K.S Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, (Thorsons, 2022), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Iyengar, 147.

<sup>45</sup> B.K.S Iyengar, *Core of the Yoga Sutras; The Definitive Guide to the Philosophy of Yoga* (Hammersmith, London: Harper Thorsons, 2012) 134.

<sup>46</sup> Iyengar, 134-135.

in terms of ethics, correct social observances and self-analysis. These three aspects of integration help to cultivate the whole self. These external aspects are, in fact, vital to enable the refinement of the internal levels of integration.”<sup>47</sup>

As a practitioner and scholar of yoga, I cannot disregard the influence of particular Western modern concepts that have permeated both yoga classes and my scholarly work. Consequently, a meticulous analysis of these concepts becomes necessary to furnish a comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. For example, the idea of our relationship to pain. B.K.S. Iyengar writes in *Light on Life* that “We use right pain like a vaccine against the unavoidable pain and suffering that life always sends our way, but the dose must be correct. Asana practice is an opportunity to look at obstacles in practice and life and discover how we can cope with them.”<sup>48</sup> One could argue that when this book came out in 2005 this generation had also grown up with the *no pain, no gain* mentality popular in the United States with athletes, fitness professionals, and weekend warriors but what sets this quote apart is the idea that this book was written by the man who is widely credited with popularizing yoga in the West. Iyengar’s influence was multifaceted. He played a key role in introducing yoga to a wider audience. This is part of the ongoing story of *tapas*. As the therapeutic effects of yoga were being thought about, the story also grew. Also, at this time yoga “institutes” were being established and people were seeking ways to deepen their practices. Iyengar’s focus on alignment and the use of props also influenced other styles. Buddhism also was growing in the west. Connecting yoga with ideas of pain and suffering became part of the story.

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<sup>47</sup> Iyengar, 136.

<sup>48</sup> B.K.S Iyengar, *Light on Life: The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom*, (Rodale Books, 2005), 51.

“Most people want to take joy without suffering. I will take both. [And] see how far suffering takes me. When you do not resist suffering, you will make friends with other people who suffer. I suffered a lot in my own body. Now when someone tells me of his sufferings, I feel in my body what that suffering is. My personal experience provides me with great love and compassion. So, I say, ‘My friend, let me try and do something.’ Pain comes to guide you. When you have known pain, you will be compassionate. Shared joys cannot teach us this.”<sup>49</sup> As this teaching on compassion shows, layers of the story [*tapas*] were continuing to unfold. Of course, there were many more strong voices other than Iyengar telling the story of yoga in the West, and as more and more people began buying into the growing yoga industry not all teachers were continuing to teach all the philosophical and spiritual aspects of yoga. The point of focusing on Iyengar is simple: most bought into the story that showing up for your first yoga class was not necessarily going to be easy. Some were coming seeking the physical bodies that were appearing in media, but some were also coming seeking happiness.

The pursuit of happiness emerged as an expanding trend rooted in the New Age movement’s emphasis on personal experience and individual empowerment. Alternative modalities and a concentration on self-improvement prompted individuals to investigate their inner selves, chart their unique paths, and place their trust in intuition. Numerous instructors, ranging from those teaching Kundalini yoga to Yin, championed the notion of holistic well-being and an worldview of interconnectedness. Nevertheless, the focal point that continued to gain momentum was a complex web of physicality, specifically the incorporation of yoga’s physical aspects, albeit often in a diluted spiritual context masquerading as a fitness-oriented version of yoga. Happiness was being commodified along with yoga, but teachers were still quoting Indian teachers as a way

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<sup>49</sup> Iyengar, 52.



to show that they, too, had wisdom. An often-read quote in Iyengar classes at the time (and to this day) is “As we experience pleasures happily, we must also learn not to lose our happiness when pain comes. As we see good in pleasure, we should learn to see good in pain. Learn to find comfort even in discomfort. We must not try to run from the pain but to move through and beyond it. This is the cultivation of tenacity and perseverance, which is a spiritual attitude toward yoga. This is also the spiritual attitude toward life.”<sup>50</sup> The idea of taking what you had learned on your mat and taking those lessons off the mat and applying it to your life was also growing. Grounded in this understanding that many continue to work towards improving their life by using their yoga practice, it’s with humbleness that I offer my theory (found in the Conclusion section of this thesis) as a model to use *tapas* and story to grow, change, build self-awareness and perhaps an increased sense of purpose and happiness.

Three systems influenced the development of yoga: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. In Hinduism, *tapas* refer to the practice of self-discipline, asceticism, and austerity, which are considered essential for spiritual growth and liberation. The practice of *tapas* involves the cultivation of self-control, restraint, and detachment from worldly desires, and is aimed at purifying the mind and body in preparation for spiritual realization. *Tapas* is a central practice in many of the different Hindu traditions, including Vedānta, Yoga, and Tantra. In Vedānta, *tapas* is one of the three disciplines of spiritual practice, along with self-inquiry (*jñāna-vicāra*) and devotion (*bhakti*).

*Tapas*, as a specific term and practice, is not commonly used in Buddhism. However, the concept of spiritual discipline and self-control is an important aspect of Buddhist practice and is emphasized in various ways throughout the Buddhist teachings.

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<sup>50</sup> Iyengar, 47.

In Buddhism, the practice of moral and ethical discipline (*sīla*) is an integral facet of the pursuit of spirituality. This involves cultivating ethical conduct, avoiding harmful actions, and developing positive qualities such as kindness, compassion, and generosity. In addition, the practice of mindfulness and meditation is also an essential component of Buddhist practice, where the practitioner learns to cultivate awareness and develop concentration and insight.

While the term *tapas* may not be used in Buddhism, the notion of spiritual discipline, self-control, and asceticism is present in some Buddhist traditions, particularly in the monastic context. Monks and nuns in various Buddhist traditions practice asceticism, including fasting, renunciation of material possessions, and celibacy, as a means of cultivating spiritual discipline and realizing the goal of enlightenment. Therefore, while *tapas* may not be a specific practice in Buddhism, the concept of spiritual discipline, self-control, and asceticism manifests in diverse manners across Buddhist teaching and practices.

The practice of *tapas* holds significant prominence within the Jain tradition, which is an ancient Indian religion that emphasizes non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), and self-discipline (*tapas*) as three fundamental principles of spiritual practice.

In Jainism, *tapas* denotes the practice of self-discipline, asceticism, and austerity, which are considered essential for spiritual growth and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The practice of *tapas* involves the cultivation of self-control, restraint, and detachment from worldly desires, and is aimed at purifying the mind and body in preparation for spiritual realization.

Jain ascetics, known as *sadhus* and *sadhvis*, practice extreme forms of *tapas*, including fasting or observing strict dietary restrictions, celibacy, and renunciation of material possessions. The purpose of these practices is to overcome the attachments and desires that bind the soul to the cycle of birth and death and to achieve liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

## Yoga as a Journey

When did we start calling the practice of yoga a journey? The “great journey” in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* refers to the journey of the individual soul from the physical world to the ultimate reality or the divine realm. It represents the quest for ultimate truth, meaning and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* teaches that the goal of human life is to understand the true nature of the self and to realize the ultimate reality, which is beyond all worldly experiences and beyond the physical realm.

In this sense the Great Journey is not only a physical journey, but a spiritual and philosophical one as it involves an inner transformation of the individual and a shift in consciousness. The text suggests that the journey to the ultimate reality is not an easy one and requires determination, discipline, and wisdom. It emphasizes the importance of seeking the guidance of a teacher or a mentor who can guide one on this journey and help one to overcome the obstacles and challenges along the way.

But what if there is no teacher or mentor available to you? Using another principle of yoga, *svādhyāya* (self-study), a great journey still could be undertaken.

The Great Journey in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* represents a journey of self-discovery, self-realization, and liberation, and teaches the goal of human life is to understand the true nature of the self and to realize the ultimate reality. The journey of self-discovery and the power of storytelling are deeply interconnected. By exploring our own stories and sharing them with others, we can gain insight into ourselves and our place in the world, and we can inspire others to do the same. In this way, storytelling plays a vital role in helping us understand ourselves and our shared humanity.

## Storytelling and Its Importance to Humanity

### Aristotle +

Aristotle was a philosopher who lived more than 2,000 years ago, but his ideas about storytelling have continued to influence writers and storytellers throughout history. He was one of the first to analyze the structure of stories. Aristotle's *Poetics* is one of the earliest and most influential works of literary criticism. In it, he breaks down the components of a well-crafted story, including plot, character, and language. His ideas about the importance of unity of action, character, and time have been especially influential to the art of storytelling. The storytelling principles found in *Poetics* have influenced many of the most successful works of literature, film, and theater ever written and told. Clearly, Aristotle's ideas have stood the test of time.

Aristotle believed that characters were the most important element of a story, and that their actions and choices should drive the plot. He argued that characters should be complex and realistic, with both strengths and flaws. Aristotle also observed, according to Marks in *Inside Story*, “that *drama imitates life* (and called this *mimesis*).”<sup>51</sup> Storytelling pervades the entire fabric of human societies and cultures. “We think in story. It's hardwired in our brain. It's how we make strategic sense of the otherwise overwhelming world around us.”<sup>52</sup>

Aristotle also emphasized the importance of emotions in stories; that stories should evoke emotions within their audience. Lisa Crone, a prominent story analyst, speaker, and a UCLA writing professor writes in her book, *Wired for Story*, that “Story helps us survive not only in the life-and-death physical sense but also in a life-well-lived social sense. Story is the language of

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<sup>51</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Lisa Cron, *Wired for Story: The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence*, (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2012), 8.

experience, whether it's ours, someone else's, or that of fictional characters."<sup>53</sup> Aristotle (and storytellers throughout time) have argued that the best way to evoke emotions was using vivid language and powerful imagery. Marks writes that "This means writers [and storytellers] are observers and interpreters of life."<sup>54</sup>

By understanding Aristotle's fundamental principles of good storytelling, writers and storytellers can produce works that are emotionally powerful, intellectually stimulating, and engaging. But what of our own stories? "Most of what we know is unconscious, which makes getting to this information difficult. We must, therefore, develop and hone an effective process to gain access to the knowledge that lies within."<sup>55</sup>

Christopher Vogler, who developed an ingenious storytelling model that had a profound and lasting impact on Hollywood, noticed early in his career that there were "common elements in adventure stories and myths, certain intriguingly familiar characters, props, locations, and situations. [A] pattern or a template... guiding the design of stories."<sup>56</sup> After crossing paths with Campbell's work, Vogler realized that Campbell had "fully explored the pattern"<sup>57</sup> he had been sensing. He felt as though Campbell had broken the secret code of story. Vogler went on to write a seven-page memo he called "*A Practical Guide to The Hero with a Thousand Faces*"<sup>58</sup> which evolved into an eighty-page email that was circulated throughout Hollywood. His *Practical Guide* would be later credited with underpinning many of Hollywood's blockbusters, including *Star Wars*. Robert McKee, award-winning author of *Story: Substance, Style, and the Principles of*

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<sup>53</sup> Cron, 8-9.

<sup>54</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Marks, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition: Mythic Structure for Writers*, (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2020), xv.

<sup>57</sup> Vogler, xv.

<sup>58</sup> Vogler, xvi.

*Screenwriting*, writes that “Story is about archetypes, not stereotypes. The archetypal story unearths a universally human experience, then wraps itself inside a unique, culture-specific expression.”<sup>59</sup>

So, why, you might ask, is all this important to practicing *tapas*?

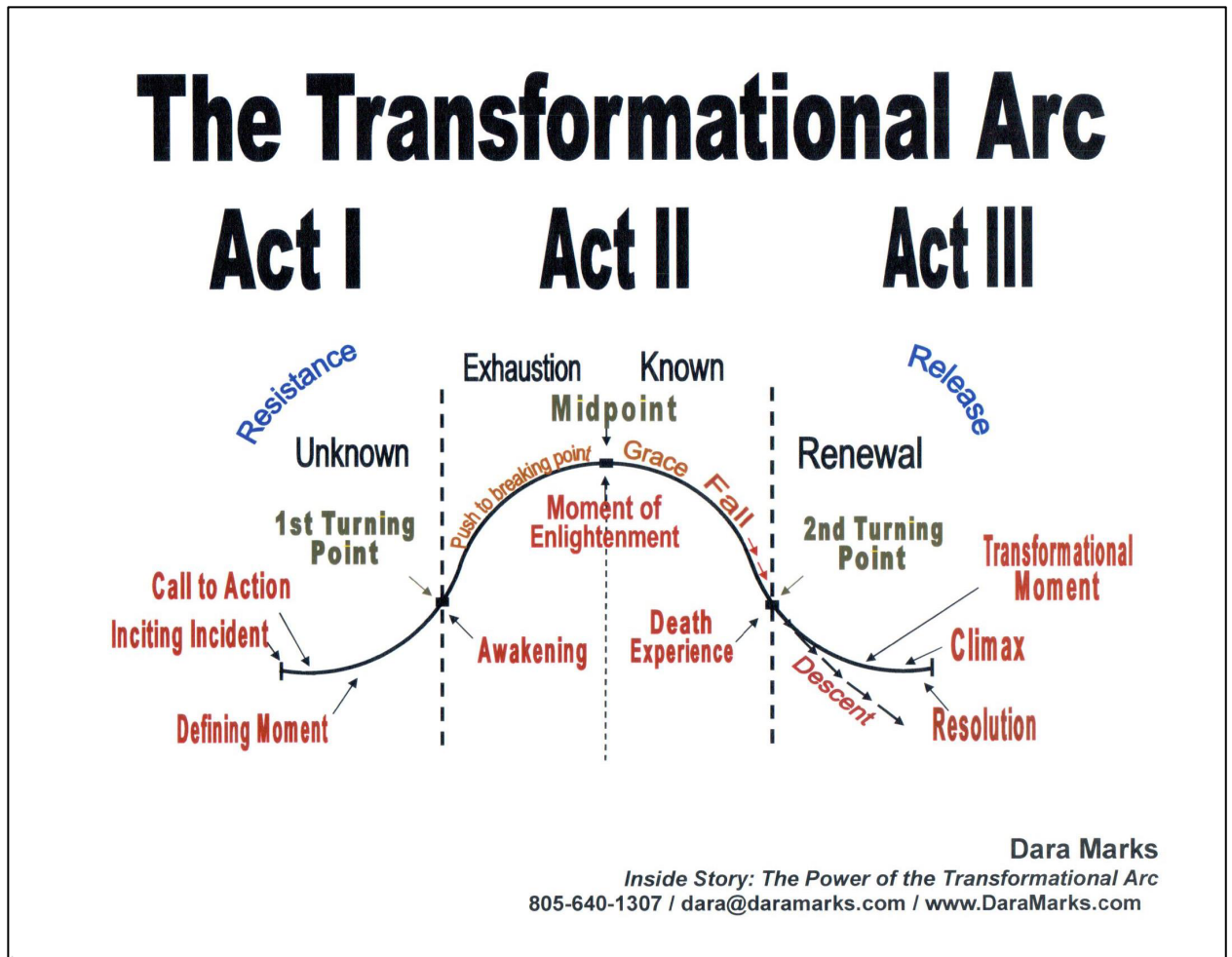
Yoga, and the practice of *tapas*, can be instrumental in self-observation, a powerful key to our own life story. Oftentimes, though, our interpretation of reality can be skewed simply because of the internal stories we tell ourselves. When individuals reflect on the development of their character and contemplate the decisions they make throughout their lives, they may examine their personal narrative. As Marks writes, “A natural story structure is one that reflects the true nature of the human experience. At its core, this structure demonstrates that the conflicts and problems in our outer, physical world do impact our internal reality. When problems of great magnitude arise, our own personal character is tested and often strengthened or diminished by the encounter.”<sup>60</sup> When one undertakes a *tapas* practice (at least these days), oftentimes what a person is seeking is wholeness. Marks continues, “This quest for wholeness, for connection to all the undiscovered parts of our true nature... is the model around which [the] theory of the transformational arc [Figure 1] is formed. We are either moving toward life or away from it is the heart of the human drama. To stand up and fight through the conflicts, confrontations, and disappointment we all encounter is the heroic challenge.”<sup>61</sup> Our hero(ine)’s story.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 4.

<sup>60</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Marks, 3.



*Figure 1 Dara Marks Transformational Arc<sup>62</sup>*

For the purposes of this thesis, we will interchange the words hero(ine), character, and protagonist, for all are but the same thing: our *tapas* practitioner. Furthermore, in addition to utilizing yoga psychology (discussed later), I propose that when *tapas* and the framework of storytelling are understood and practiced together in an effective way, access to developing self-awareness and applying this information to improve our lives is possible.

Ultimately “every one of the stories we tell, tells our *own* story. Though a story seldom reflects the direct autobiographical chronology of our lives, it *always* reflects what we know to be

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<sup>62</sup> Marks, 323.

true. It has to; we don't *know* anything else.”<sup>63</sup> This desire to know ourselves, this quest for wholeness, lies at the heart of undertaking a modern *tapas* practice. The pursuit of wholeness could plausibly constitute the ultimate rationale behind our existential experience. “The place that lies between what we know and what we are coming to know about ourselves (and others) is sometimes referred to as the borderland. It is the place where new consciousness is beginning to dawn, the place where we emerge from darkness into light.”<sup>64</sup> The Tibetan Buddhists call borderland *the bardo of becoming*. However, what if the practitioner is not willing to embark on the journey, what then? If not willing to embark on the journey, Rinpoche writes that “resistance to change puts us at odds with reality, and this creates never-ceasing dissatisfaction”<sup>65</sup> Yoga, and specifically *tapas*, can align us with our true nature, with equanimity and homeostasis, with growth and self-transformation. As Marks writes, “Characteristics like integrity, compassion, ambition, courage, and resiliency only manifest themselves when something challenges their existence. If we choose to rise to a challenge, then we will inevitably engage a new part of our inner being in the struggle. As a result, we expand and grow toward the fullness of our true nature.”<sup>66</sup>

### **The Character Arc in Storytelling**

As humans, we have an innate desire to see growth and development, both in ourselves and others. When we witness a character arc in a story, we experience a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment because we are witnessing a character's personal growth and transformation over time. Character Arc's typically involves a character undergoing a change or transformation, often because of their experiences and challenges throughout the story. This change could be a shift in

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<sup>63</sup> Marks, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Marks, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Rinpoche and Tworikov, *In Love With The World*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 6.



their beliefs, values, or behaviors, or a realization of their own flaws or weaknesses. As the character develops and evolves, we as readers or viewers become emotionally invested in their journey and feel a sense of connection to them.

Moreover, a well-crafted character arc can create a powerful emotional impact, leaving with us a lasting impression. We might personally identify with the character's struggles and feel inspired by their triumphs. Witnessing a character overcome barriers and grow as a person can be a deeply satisfying experience that leaves us feeling enriched and fulfilled. With that in mind, what is the *arc of the possible* if we conceive of ourselves as being the protagonist in our own life story? How can we use story and the practice of *tapas* as equipment for life? Although this thesis will only be the tip of the iceberg in the depth of character arc development, a short lesson in essentially what a character arc looks like may prove beneficial as we seek to apply it to our own life using a *tapas experience*. In a short three act synopsis it might just look like a mythological hero(ine)'s journey in which the protagonist leaves the realm of the familiar, ventures into a challenging unknown, and emerges victorious.

A character arc typically begins with the introduction of the character in their initial state, which may include strengths, weakness, flaws, or limitations. In traditional storytelling, we meet our hero(ine) in the opening scene (of Act I) in a state of inertia (perhaps settling for a life that may be emotionally safe and endurable, but that lacks passion, risk, and fulfillment) – so, we start at a crisis.

By living in an emotional armor (we all carry) to protect us from our deepest fears (whatever those may be) our protagonist is essentially existing in a false self that they present to the world to avoid feeling vulnerable and scared. Old wounds from their past (no matter how small and/or subtle) have left them unconsciously terrified of experiencing that pain again. They will do

just about anything to avoid facing that fear, even if it means living a false, limited, and unfulfilled existence. John Truby, an American screenwriter, director, screenwriting teacher, and author, writes in *The Anatomy of Story* that “One of the powers of storytelling is showing us how a human being who is so capable of brilliant and creative thought is also capable of intricate and enslaving delusion.”<sup>67</sup>

The catalyst for any story is our hero(ine) must accept the call to adventure. Joseph Campbell shares in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* that the passage of the hero may be “...overground, incidentally; fundamentally it is inward – into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world.”<sup>68</sup> No matter where a person finds themselves along their journey in life, at some point there will be a seemingly insurmountable challenge or sense of dissatisfaction they face. As Chapple writes in *Karma and Creativity* “This is the crux of the Indian philosophical endeavor: to see the dissatisfaction inherent in the changes of life and then to find a process by which this dissatisfaction may be apprehended.”<sup>69</sup> Now is the perfect time to dive into a *tapas* practice; to accept the call to adventure, which could also be referred to as the search for meaning. As Viktor Frankel writes: “This striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man.”<sup>70</sup> This striving, this urgency, is a part of who we are as humans. As Marks writes, “...willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously... the protagonist is pulled into the story.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) 85.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 29.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Chapple, *Karma and Creativity*, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, (Beacon Press, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2006), 80.

<sup>71</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 192.

How would it feel to move past the limitations constructed by our mind and enter a state of awareness where we could have concrete access to peak experiences that transform us from the inside out? This is the essence of the *tapas* and the storytelling goal. This is what we are hoping for in this personal exercise of a character arc. Our hero(ine) must move from a state of being stuck, through a period, and hopefully change (arc). Truby writes that “This is the simple geometry of any story because it is the sequence of human growth. Human growth is elusive, but it is real”<sup>72</sup> and what must be expressed in storytelling above anything else. A good storyteller (either written or visually) must show, rather than tell, the character’s authentic feelings in action. This transformation from living fully in an identity to living fully in an authentic essence is the hope of a good character arc. Truby writes “Your hero’s development depends on what beliefs he starts with, how he challenges them, and how they have changed by the end of the story.”<sup>73</sup> The tool for creating this arc is the body.

Combining internal and external conflicts (challenges) is a storytelling secret that will make our hero(ine)’s story a page turner (and compelling is what we want!) and more importantly, effective. By hopefully exposing our practitioner’s wounds (in our controlled, safe environment) there is an epic adventure awaiting. By focusing on cultivating *vidyā* (deep awareness or knowledge), our practitioner will perhaps see what fear is driving their actions.

By focusing on breaking *saṃskāras* (habits), and by examining their struggles and experiences, the practitioner begins to learn important lessons, gain new insights, or develop new skills that help them grow and evolve. This *abhyāsa* (practice/habit) and process of transformation may involve setbacks, failures, or moments of doubt, but ultimately leads the character towards a new understanding of themselves and the world around them. By utilizing the yoga concept of

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<sup>72</sup> John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story*, 32.

<sup>73</sup> Truby, 81.

*śanaiḥ* (slowing way down), the goal is to see clearly what has been hiding out of their awareness. Along the way, a new way of *darśana* (seeing/view) will hopefully emerge. By continuing to face the unknown with compassionate curiosity our hero(ine) is likely to come up against resistance. This *refusal of the call* is also called *the defining moment* because it speaks to that fear of the unknown. This critical juncture is about change and transition: giving up the known for the unknown.

Resistance is a good sign. This often means that our hero(ine) is experiencing some level of discomfort or uncertainty about changing. Remember, *tapas* is not about being comfortable. Resistance is about expectations being disrupted (or fear of expectations), a sense of security, sometimes feeling out of control, awkward, or embarrassed. Resistance, though, is just a disguise. What hides beneath it is fear. *Darn it, there it is again.* Fear of failure? Fear of success? Fear of being *seen*? Resistance can help identify potential barriers to success and highlight areas where additional support or resources may be needed.

This is the point where our hero(ine) might have to change an existing belief system. This could look as simple as identification, taking responsibility, deconstructing that belief, brainstorming an interpretation, creating an action plan, creating opportunities to be immersed in the new belief, and perhaps sharing the experience with a trusted friend. This is also an excellent time to remind ourselves that our stories warn us that the greatest human tragedy might just be to continue to live disconnected from our true nature. This quest to know ourselves forms the epic journey of our lives. As Marks writes “On some level it’s made clear that a far worse fate may await. This includes death of hopes, dreams, desires, spirit, relationships, and creative potential. [But] this story is important because these characters are given the opportunity to become truly

heroic by transcending their own internal limitations.”<sup>74</sup> This stage of the journey usually reveals the recognition of the fatal flaw.

The fatal flaw of a character is the struggle within a character to maintain a survival system after it has outlived its usefulness. The fatal flaw of a character is an extremely important element in the journey of self-transformation because it represents a key obstacle that the character must overcome to grow and evolve. A character’s fatal flaw is a deeply ingrained personality trait, belief, or behavior that holds them back from achieving their goals or living up to their potential. It is a flaw that can have negative consequences for the character and those around them, and often leads to conflicts or setbacks throughout the story.

For a character to undergo meaningful self-transformation, they must first recognize their fatal flaw and acknowledge its negative impact on their life. This process of self-awareness can be difficult and painful, as it requires the character to confront their own weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This law of conflict is more than an aesthetic principle as McKee writes “conflict is the soul of story. Story is metaphor for life, and to be alive is to be in seemingly perpetual conflict.”<sup>75</sup>

Once the character has recognized their fatal flaw, they must then work to overcome it. This process may involve learning new skills, adopting new beliefs or values, or making difficult decisions that challenge their previous assumptions or behavior. Through their struggle to overcome their flaw, the practitioner is forced to confront their own limitations, and ultimately emerge stronger and more self-aware. The use of a yoga practice to continue to reflect on their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual state is critical.

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<sup>74</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 211.

At this point our hero(ine) should be clearly able to identify and define for themselves an emerging subject of their story, the plot (which is the external goals), the obstacles (usually recognized now as fear), a subplot (which is the internal goal or goals), their character flaw, and character traits (or behaviors). This takes us firmly into the midpoint of our story – our hero(ine)’s *tapas* and transformation story.

Within a framework of the art and craft of story the midpoint of a compelling tale is a critical moment in the hero(ine)’s journey of transformation. It often represents a turning point in the story, where the character moves from reacting to the events of the story to taking proactive steps to achieve their goals. This shift often involves a change in the character’s perspective, motivation, or approach to the challenges they face.

The midpoint challenges the character’s assumptions in the form of unexpected obstacles, setbacks, or conflicts that force them to re-evaluate their beliefs or assumptions about themselves and the world around them. This can be a moment of crisis or realization for our protagonist, where they must confront their own limitations or flaws to move forward. As Marks very succinctly writes: “Where there is a breakdown, there is potential for something new to break through.”<sup>76</sup> Although the structural element of exhaustion is recognized usually around the midpoint of a story, the “real function is to create a breaking point in the dramatic tension.”<sup>77</sup> This often requires the hero(ine) to make a pivotal decision that sets them on a new course of action or changes the direction of their story. This decision can be a defining moment for the hero(ine), where they must choose between their values, desires, or obligations to achieve their goals.

At this pivotal, defining moment in the journey a moment of enlightenment occurs: a new perspective, insight, or realization that transforms our protagonist and propels them forward in

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<sup>76</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 232.

<sup>77</sup> Marks, 232.

their story. The moment of enlightenment is typically the point where the hero(ine) fully recognizes the truth about themselves, their situation, or the world around them. This moment can be a turning point, as the protagonist begins to take active steps towards achieving their goals and overcoming the challenges they face. It may also mark the beginning of a new phase in the character's development, where they start to apply what they've learned and grow in new and unexpected ways. This is commonly called *the dark night of the soul*, where the hero(ine) faces a crisis that tests their resolve and forces them to confront their deepest fears and doubts. Evelyn Underhill dedicates a whole chapter to the dark night of the soul in her most famous book, *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study In The Nature And Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. Underhill writes that mystics are “unanimous in declaring that this is a necessary stage in the growth of the spiritual consciousness.”<sup>78</sup> Through this experience, the hero(ine) gains a new understanding of themselves and their purpose and emerges stronger and more determined to continue the journey. Underhill wrote extensively throughout her life about the idea that we all have the “germ of that same transcendent life... and this spark of the soul, once we permit its emergence...will conform... to those laws of organic growth [and] those inexorable conditions of transcendence.”<sup>79</sup>

Importantly, the midpoint sets up the climax of the story. The midpoint often foreshadows the events of the climax and sets up the final conflict or resolution of the story. What is key at this point, too, is that this is not about external circumstances, but an internal reaction to the midpoint that opens up a new consciousness in the form of a *period of grace*, a “new idea, a new understanding, or a new perspective on the problems or issues of the past, he or she will be inspired

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<sup>78</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Preeminent Study in The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. (Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., New York, New York, 1990. Originally published: London: Methuen, 1911), 391.

<sup>79</sup> Underhill, 445.

and motivated to face what lies ahead with renewed vigor, strength and resolve.”<sup>80</sup> This speaks to the theme of our story: figuring out the root cause of the *something* that had been out of balance. The protagonist enjoys well-earned grace; a time of thriving, not just striving. A period of grace strengthens a story because this gift is the reward for having achieved greater self-awareness. As Marks reminds us, though, “...it must also be evident that there is work still to be done because transformational change cannot be achieved without commitment, hard work, courage, and a lot of *letting go*...”<sup>81</sup> The mere attainment of higher consciousness is insufficient in and of itself. It necessitates the concomitant practice of efficacious *karma* or action, prior to its transmutation into a superior state.

What follows the grace period is some sort of fall. As a good storyteller has led us into expectation, making us think we understand, as McKee writes they “crack open reality, creating surprise and curiosity, sending us back through [the] story again. On each trip back, we gain deeper and deeper insight into the natures of the character(s) and their world.”<sup>82</sup> McKee continues, “When a story genuinely progresses it calls upon greater and greater human capacity, demands great and greater willpower, generates greater and greater change in characters’ lives, and places them at greater and greater jeopardy.”<sup>83</sup> During the fall, the character faces their most difficult obstacles and difficulties, often experiencing a series of setbacks and failures. And if this seems like the worst, prepare yourself.

Now we’re ready for the Death Experience. Transformational change is the death of an old system of survival (remember, the fatal flaw) and the birth of a new one – to let go of what is obsolete and surrender to the new.

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<sup>80</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 254.

<sup>81</sup> Marks, 257.

<sup>82</sup> Robert McKee, *Story*, 237.

<sup>83</sup> McKee, 294.



Here the writer and storyteller force the protagonist into a situation that will bring about their undoing – which is how we will arrive at the second turning point: a very big obstruction into the wheel of progress for the hero(ine). Using the internal struggle has a bigger mission – the protagonist feels like they have lost, especially the gifts they have earned/received during the midpoint (the grace period). This is the character’s lowest point, where they have hit rock bottom, and all seems lost.

Think about our own emotional response to the experience of loss: disillusionment, maybe anger, betrayal, sorrow, defeat – and at the least frustration, confusion, maybe like life is throwing you a cruel trick. One thing that can’t be taken away at this point, though, is the enlightenment of the midpoint. It can feel like all the internal development is now lost – but we’re not at the end of the story – If (and only if) the protagonist is willing to fight. This is the challenge of the Third Act. Although they may lose faith in themselves and their abilities, and feel like giving up on their goals, they don’t because they have determination earned from *tapas*. William Goldman, an important figure in storytelling because of his talent, versatility, and understanding of the craft, argues that “the key to all story endings is to give the audience what it wants, but not the way it expects.”<sup>84</sup> By this point in the story, we care deeply for our hero(ine).

The hero(ine) represents a symbol of hope, strength, and resilience that we aspire to embody in our own lives. Even when the hero fails, we continue to root for them because we want to see them overcome their obstacles and achieve their goals. It is often through this experience of failure and defeat that the character learns significant lessons and gains the strength and resolve to keep going.

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<sup>84</sup> McKee, 310.

The hero(ine)'s failures often serve to create tension and conflict in the story, which can make the eventual victory more satisfying. Watching the hero struggle and overcome challenges can be inspiring, as it reminds us that we too can overcome adversity in our own lives. As Marks writes "All conflict is part of a developmental continuum that comes from somewhere in our past and takes us to someplace new; opening the door to our future."<sup>85</sup> The hero(ine) often represents the values and ideals that we hold dear, such as justice, courage, and perseverance. We want to see the hero succeed because their success reinforces our belief in these values. They may have a moment of clarity or realization, where they recognize what they truly want and what they need to do to achieve it. Sometimes, what a character thought they *wanted* at the beginning of the journey isn't what they *needed*.

In the final act of our story, the character continues to act and works toward the goal again, but with a newfound sense of purpose and determination. They may face one final obstacle or conflict, but they are able to overcome it and achieve their objective. There is a point towards the end of the story where we will see our hero(ine) make a *conscious* decision toward achieving the goal of the plot. This decision is a pivotal event in our story, "because this is where the protagonist decides his or her own fate."<sup>86</sup> In a tragic story, the character fails, but that is a story for another time. As Marks informs us "Victory or defeat...will define the true nature of his or her character – whether he or she is heroic or tragic: moving toward life or running away from it. Transformation is *always* a conscious choice."<sup>87</sup>

Throughout this journey, the character has undergone a transformation; growing and evolving in response to the obstacles they faced. The decline and subsequent resurgence that occurs

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<sup>85</sup> Dara Marks, *Inside Story*, 151-152.

<sup>86</sup> Marks, 295.

<sup>87</sup> Marks, 295.

towards the conclusion of the character's narrative arc signifies a pivotal juncture in their odyssey, affording them the opportunity to realize their aspirations and reach their full potential. Hero(ine)'s embody the human spirit and our desire to overcome adversity and achieve our goals.

## **Hero and Heroine Journey**

Joseph Campbell's discernment of the hero's quest and his distillation of world myth into an easily digestible template has had a powerful impact on contemporary culture. In building upon (and/or rejection of) Campbell's work numerous authors have created and shared other versions of a journey, including the heroines.

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was first published in 1949. Campbell's hero's journey is a mythological framework that describes the common stages that many heroes go through in their stories. As Ananthnarayanan and Pethe write in *The Dhīra – The Inner Journey of the Hero: Exploring the Indic perspective on the Hero's journey and its comparison to Joseph Campbells Hero's Journey*, Campbell "combined psychology with comparative mythology to give a universal motif of adventure and transformation."<sup>88</sup> Campbell's framework has been used by writers, filmmakers, and other storytellers to create compelling and meaningful stories.

Campbell argued that the hero's journey is a universal and timeless mythic pattern that is found in the stories, myths, and legends of cultures all around the world. He believed that the hero's journey reflects the human psyche and the universal experiences of human life. Bernie Clark tells us that Joseph Campbell wrote in *The Hero's Journey* that "the first function of mythology [then] is to function by showing everything as a metaphor to transcendence."<sup>89</sup> Clark also writes in his book *From the Gita to the Grail* that the psychological function of mythology "puts us in

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<sup>88</sup> Raghu Ananthnarayanan, and Sanjyot Pethe, "The *dhīra* -The Inner Journey of the Hero", (*International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3(3)), 2.

<sup>89</sup> Bernie Clark, *From the Gita to the Grail*, 329.

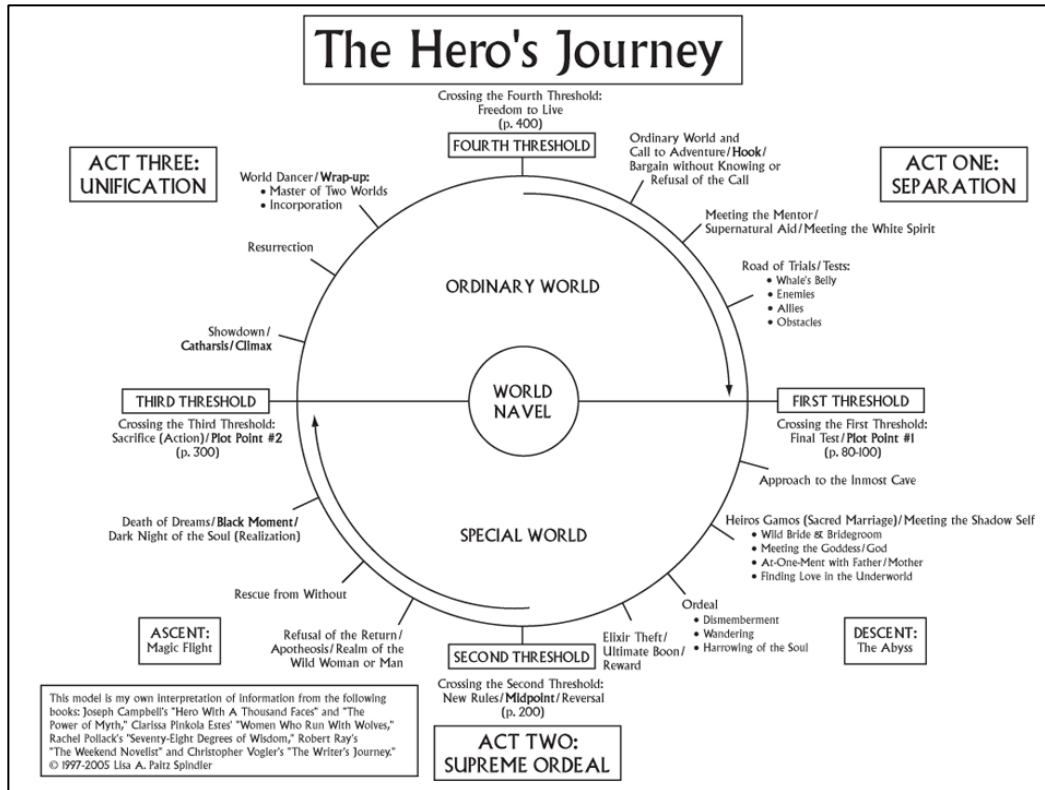
accord with the inevitable arc of aging that we all traverse [and that] we each must come to terms with who we are, how we change with time, and how our roles in society and within our family also change. We look to the stories of our culture to give us the understanding we need to make sense of our changing roles.”<sup>90</sup>

Campbell noted that although the specifics of the hero’s journey may differ in different cultures and stories, the underlying structure and symbolism remains the same. He identified common archetypes, such as the mentor, the threshold guardian, the shadow, and the wise old man, which appear in many different stories and cultures. Campbell’s Hero’s Journey framework [Figure 2] explores a 17-step journey of a hero and works with external events and an internal landscape. Externally, myths that provide a direction for society to follow are “etiological; they explain why the society is structured the way it is.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Clark, 124.

<sup>91</sup> Clark, 90.



*Figure 2 Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey*<sup>92</sup>

Campbell believed that the hero's journey reflects the human experience of transformation, growth, and self-discovery. He argued that the stages of the journey reflect the challenges and obstacles that we all face as we navigate through life, and the universal human desire to find meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Campbell saw the hero as "anyone who transforms life the way it is through external adventure and internal exploration and comes back to the world with new gifts."<sup>93</sup> In addition to the practice of *tapas*, for the purposes of this thesis, we look to the observances offered in the *Yoga Sūtra* known as *svādhyāya* (self-study and self-reflection) and *īśhvara praṇidhāna* (surrender). These are two of the five *niyamas*, the second limb of the eight limbs of yoga. Both *svādhyāya* and *īśhvara praṇidhāna* are considered essential practices for

<sup>92</sup> Lisa A. Paltz Spindler "Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey", *ARE.NA*, <https://www.are.na/block/5983016>, accessed 2.28.23.

<sup>93</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, "The *dhīra* -The Inner Journey of the Hero", 2.

achieving a state of yoga, as they help to purify the mind, cultivate positive qualities, and align oneself with a higher purpose.

From the Indic lens, Campbell acknowledged the rich foundations of Hindu mythology. Ananthnarayanan and Pethe write that the hero's journey is to develop *viveka* (discrimination) and move towards ultimate good. These authors write that “the Indian philosophical system, especially *Upaniṣad*, *Yoga Sūtra*, and the *Mahābhārata*, views a hero as *dhīra* [which is] one who experiences life fully while being anchored in a state of *dhyāna* (attention).”<sup>94</sup> In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* Nachiketas is the *dhīra*, “the one who sets out to discover the ultimate reality so that he can work in the world from that space of inner knowing.”<sup>95</sup> The aforementioned quote serves to reaffirm the belief that contemporary ascetic practices (specifically, modern *tapas*) may draw inspiration from age-old scriptures, encapsulating the fundamental object of the present thesis. Thus, from an “Indic perspective *dhīra* is the one who, through their practice, cross[es] the ocean of sorrow, reach[es] a space of *viveka khyāti* and then operate[s] in the world from *viveka*.”<sup>96</sup> The desire to understand the mystery of life is awoken through wonder and for Joseph Campbell “the mystical function [of mythology] reconciles consciousness to the fact of its own existence.”<sup>97</sup>

Ananthnarayanan and Pethe write that this experience is indicated in *Yoga Sūtra* 2.26 which they translate as “sustained discrimination and illumined comprehension are the way to end sorrow.” The authors continue that “*viveka khyāti* means understanding the distinction between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, having a discriminant understanding or perception of the world and understanding the true from the false.”<sup>98</sup> With this clear understanding of the distinction between

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<sup>94</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Bernie Clark, *From the Gita to the Grail*, 332.

<sup>98</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 6.

the self and the world, a participant in the *tapas* experience would not require any external proof to validate their existence beyond the present moment of aliveness. In other words, through sustained discrimination and illumined comprehension, one can discern the true nature of the self and the world and find liberation from sorrow.

Ananthnarayanan and Pethe utilize the *Yoga Sūtra*, and Shri Ganapati Sthapati's "articulation of divine manifestation and the Yogic framework related to dance"<sup>99</sup> to propose their own framework of a map [Figure 3] of the *dhīra* journey. They, along with this author, argue that to conquered inner demons and achieve a state of equanimity a new framework is possible. They, too, argue that the hero(ine)'s (*dhīra*) journey is not just an external quest, but an inner journey of self-discovery and transformation.

### The *dhīra*'s 12 Steps

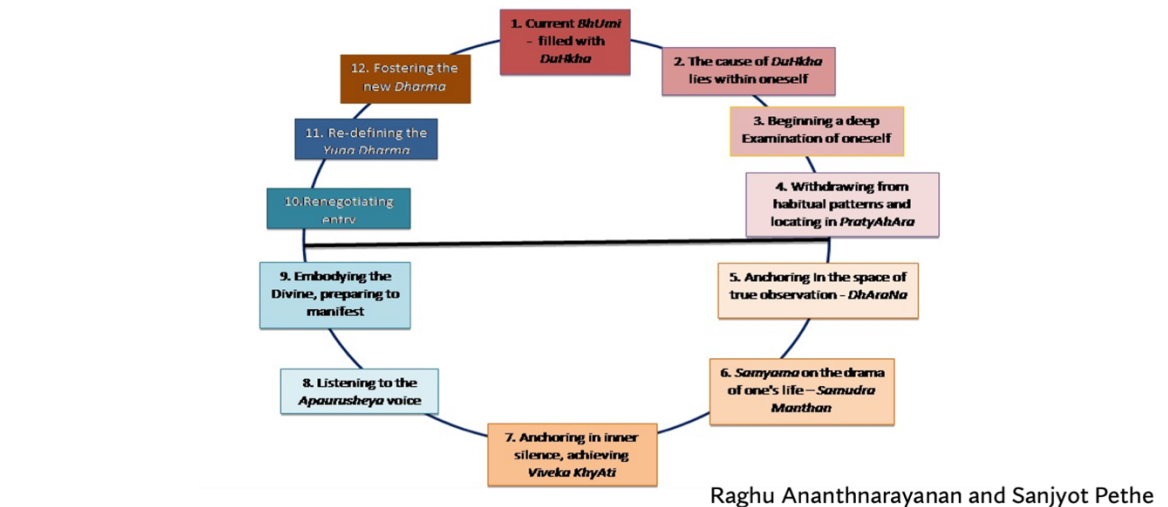


Figure 3 The *dhīra*'s 12 Steps<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 8.

<sup>100</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 10.

These authors note that while Campbell's model has been influential in Western literature and film, it may not fully capture the Indic perspective on the hero's journey. It's hopeful that my *tapas* and story framework shared here in this paper will continue to build on Ananthnarayanan and Pethe's work. Perhaps building off the *tapas* and story framework and Ananthnarayanan and Pethe's work with a future IRB study and/or further research, new insights can enrich our understanding of this timeless concept.

Overall, Campbell's view was that the hero's journey, a *monomyth*, is a universal human story that reflects the common experiences and aspirations of all people, and that this commonality is what makes it such a powerful and resonant mythic pattern. Campbell's view that there is a singular template for transformation all over the world has also been the subject of criticism "from folklorists who have dismissed the concept as a non-scholarly approach to suffering from source-selection bias,"<sup>101</sup> among other criticisms. By leaving out "equally valid stories... which did not fit"<sup>102</sup> within Campbell's preconceived mold, he may have inspired others to create their own interpretations and frameworks and "build" off his work.

Vogler went on to teach Campbell's work at film schools and to publish the bestselling book *The Writer's Journey*, in 1992, based on his "*practical guide* [which] became an important cheat sheet for those in the film industry."<sup>103</sup> The *practical guide* provides a step-by-step approach for writers to use the principles of mythic structure in crafting their own stories. It includes guidance on developing characters, creating plot arcs, and crafting a compelling narrative that draws on universal themes and archetypes. Vogler drew on the work of Joseph Campbell and applied his principles to the craft of storytelling, arguing that stories that follow mythic structure

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<sup>101</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 2.

<sup>102</sup> Ananthnarayanan, and Pethe, 3.

<sup>103</sup> Maria Tatar, *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*, (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2021), xiv.



are more likely to resonate with audiences and have a lasting impact. Although he certainly wasn't a critic of Campbell's, Vogler made modifications and reinterpreted the steps.

A true critic of Campbell's hero's journey was Maureen Murdock. As Jean Bolen writes in her book, *Goddess in Everywoman*, Murdock approached Campbell, in 1981, to "discuss how the Hero's journey differs for women"<sup>104</sup> and was shocked when Campbell responded that "women do not need to make the journey. Her experience as a therapist told her that women too struggled to move from the place they were at, they too were looking for a deeper transformation."<sup>105</sup> Instead of trying to convince Campbell of her belief, Murdock created the heroine's journey; a map of the feminine healing process. Murdock said that "there is no *the* heroine's journey, no pattern that fits all of us."<sup>106</sup> She found Campbell's hero's journey "spiritually lacking... [that] it did not address the deep wounding of the feminine on a personal or cultural level."<sup>107</sup>

Murdock writes that women do have a quest; it is a quest to "fully embrace their feminine nature, learning how to value themselves as women and to heal the deep wound of the feminine."<sup>108</sup> Murdock saw this as a very important journey "toward being a fully integrated, balanced, and whole human being. A journey that seldom receives validation from the outside world; in fact, the outer world often sabotages and interferes with it."<sup>109</sup> Murdock continues, though, that the model of the heroine's journey "is derived from Campbell's model... [but that] the language of the stages, however, is particular to women."<sup>110</sup> Murdock's map [Figure 4] is ten steps and begins with

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<sup>104</sup> Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman: Powerful Archetypes in Women's Lives*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 3.

<sup>105</sup> Bolen, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey*, xii

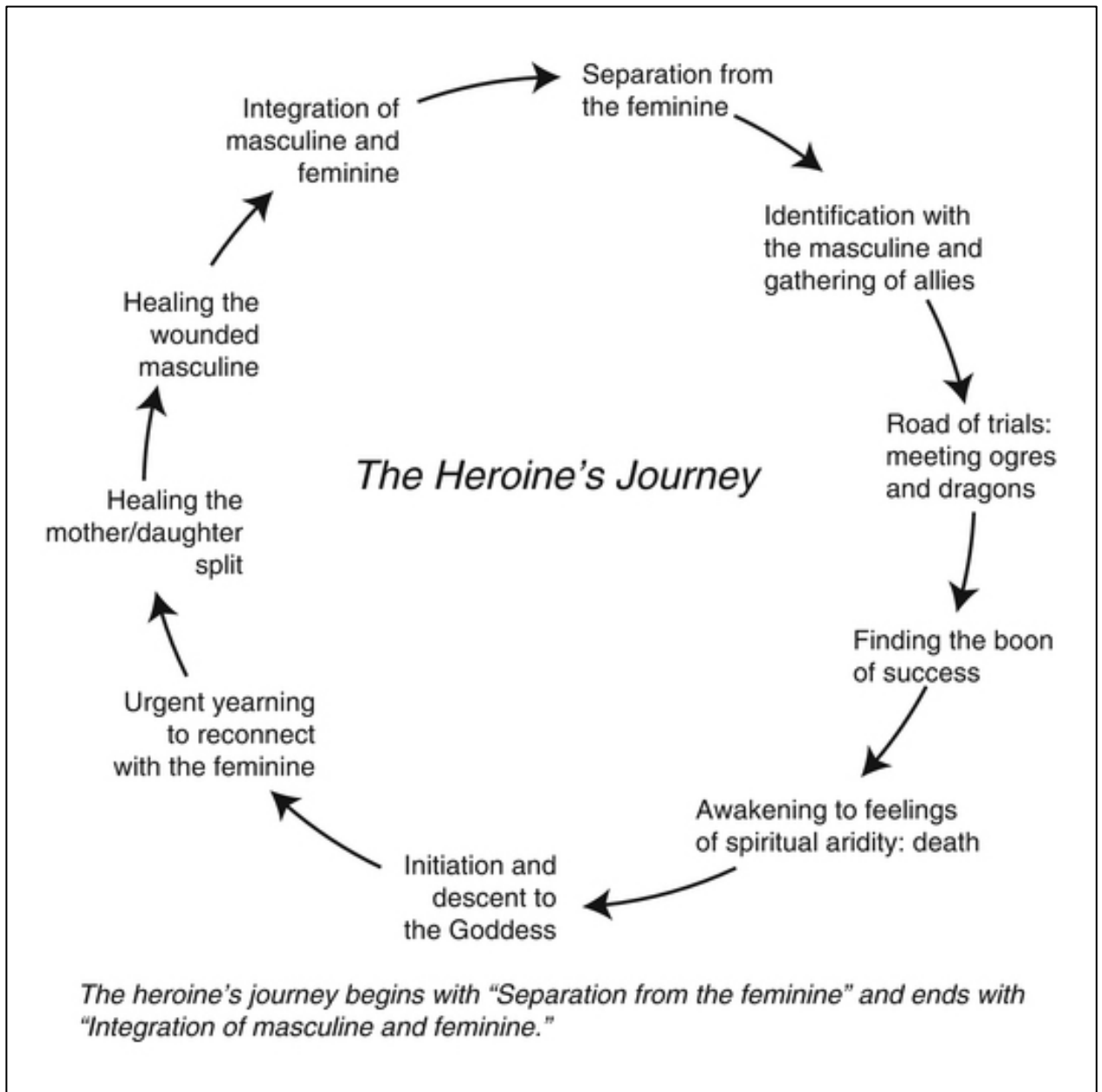
<sup>107</sup> Murdock, xv.

<sup>108</sup> Murdock, 3.

<sup>109</sup> Murdock, 3.

<sup>110</sup> Murdock, 3.

separation with the feminine and integration of feminine and masculine. Since its publication in 1990, Murdock's book received mixed reactions.



*Figure 4 Maureen Murdock Heroine's Journey<sup>111</sup>*

On the one hand, many readers and scholars have found Murdock's book to be groundbreaking and transformative, as it offers a fresh perspective on the traditional hero's journey

<sup>111</sup> Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey*, 5.

and sheds light on the unique challenges and experiences faced by women on their personal and spiritual journeys. On the other hand, some critics have argued that Murdock's approach is too essentialist, and that her model of the heroine's journey perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces a binary understanding of gender.

Kobacker writes in her thesis *The Female Hero's Journey in Narrative Media* that "other investigations in this field have been "themed around the valorization of motherhood... or healing the mother-daughter split"<sup>112</sup> Kobacker also writes in her thesis that additional research has addressed the topic of the heroine from "the varied approaches of Jungian psychology (Pearson, C.S. 2013), gestalt therapy (Polster 1992), or through modern fantasy (Campbell, L.M. 2014), fairy tale (Haase 2004) and screenwriting analysis (Vogler 2007) [but that] much of this research has neglected to foreground Campbell's mythological emphasis."<sup>113</sup> One such attempt to rectify that has been Maria Tatar's book *The Heroine with 1,001 Faces*.

Tatar writes in the Introduction of her book that "Campbell wrote *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* while teaching his class on comparative mythology at the then all-women's school, Sarah Lawrence College in New York."<sup>114</sup> Tatar shares the story of a senior walking into Campbell's office and saying, "well, Mr. Campbell, you've been talking about the hero. But what about the women? The startled professor raised his eyebrows and replied, 'the woman's the mother of the hero; she's the goal of the hero's achieving; she's the protectress of the hero; she is this, she is that. What more do you want?' [The student replied] 'I want to be the hero'"<sup>115</sup> Tatar's book tries to answer the request posed by the student.

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<sup>112</sup> Sophia Riley Kobacker, *The Female Hero's Journey in Narrative Media*, (BA-Media, Macquarie Univ, 2014), 28.

<sup>113</sup> Kobacker, 28.

<sup>114</sup> Maria Tatar, *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*, xiii.

<sup>115</sup> Tatar, xiii.

Tatar argues that “...because the Jungian philosophy and study of archetypes to which Campbell subscribed had long been derided and dismissed [the timeless universals] were gone and the academic world scrapped eternal truths in favor of cultural constructs and post-structural indeterminacy.”<sup>116</sup> Tatar felt that “Nowhere does the rigidity of archetypal thinking emerge more clearly than in the binary model of the male and female principle as it surfaced in Campbell’s world mythologies. [That] at the time of the student’s outburst, it had seemed that Campbell was doing little more than capturing the symbolic worlds of our ancestors and revealing their gendered divisions of labor rather than solidifying outworld cultural beliefs.”<sup>117</sup> *The Heroine with 1,001 Faces* is a deeply personal look at a “lifetime of reading, misreading, and rereading myths, epics, fairy tales, fiction, and film. At a time when we are moving beyond gendered divisions of heroism, our past continues to weight on us, haunt us, and invite us to reflect on the evolution of values embedded in the stories we tell, write, and re-envision.”<sup>118</sup>

Tatar felt that she had captured the thousand and one heroines in her volume “not at all in competition with Campbell’s thousand heroes [but because] the Arabic 1,001 designates a vast measure, and the final digit of ‘one’ in that number goes beyond a thousand to suggest a swerve into something without limits [and capture] the boundless possibilities as well as the bravura magnitude of heroic behavior.”<sup>119</sup> Although it’s clear this author sets out to correct an error made by Campbell because of “his conviction that women have no place in the pantheon of heroes,”<sup>120</sup> her fear was that her model would do little more than mimic Campbell’s archetype because

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<sup>116</sup> Tatar, xv.

<sup>117</sup> Tatar, xv-xvi.

<sup>118</sup> Tatar, xxvli.

<sup>119</sup> Tatar, 1.

<sup>120</sup> Tatar, 2.

“critiques and sequels run the risk of repeating and reinforcing the models they seek to challenge.”<sup>121</sup> And of course, Tatar has her own critics. We would well be surprised if she did not.

Despite these criticisms, Murdock and Tatar’s books have become a staple in Jungian, feminist, and storytelling literature and have surely inspired countless women to embrace their own personal journeys and seek out new paths of growth and self-discovery. One such woman may have been *New York Times* bestselling author, Gail Carriger, who writes in her book *The Heroine’s Journey: For Writers, Readers, and Fans of Pop Culture* that the heroine’s journey is “not simply the hero’s journey undertaken by a woman. It’s *narratively* different, not *biologically* different. While a character may present biologically as *male*, he may be gendered *feminine* by the overarching journey. Harry Potter, for example, is a *heroine*.”<sup>122</sup>

While a character may present *biologically* as *female*, she may be gendered *masculine* by her journey. Perfect example of this: the film *Wonder Woman*. *Wonder Woman* is a hero. Carriger flips this statement to make sure the reader is following along closely enough. She writes, “A female presenting person can undertake a *Hero’s journey*. A male presenting person can undertake a *Heroine’s journey*.”<sup>123</sup> Once again, the heroine’s journey is not simply the hero’s journey undertaken by a woman; it’s *narratively* different, not *biologically* different. In the context of Tatar’s book, the term “gendered” has nothing to do with “characters or story elements that behave (consciously or not) as masculine or feminine because of associated tropes, archetypes, or narrative role, regardless of biological sex and its socially ‘accepted’ associations.”<sup>124</sup> Carriger examines

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<sup>121</sup> Tatar, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Gail Carriger, *The Heroine’s Journey: For Writers, Readers, and Fans of Pop Culture* (Gail Carriger LLC, 2020), 18.

<sup>123</sup> Carriger, 19.

<sup>124</sup> Carriger, 20.

the various stages of Campbell's hero's journey and Murdock and Tater's heroine's journey and discusses the importance of representation and diversity.

Many people are becoming more aware of the ways in which traditional narratives have excluded or marginalized certain groups, including women, non-binary people, and those who do not conform to traditional gender roles. A genderless story can be timely because it can challenge and subvert 'traditional' narratives and offer a new perspective that is more inclusive and diverse. By removing gender from the equation, the story can focus on universal themes and experiences that are relevant to all people, regardless of their gender identity. In addition, a genderless story can help to break down stereotypes and promote greater understanding and empathy between people. By presenting characters and situations that are not tied to gender roles, the story can encourage readers to see people as individuals with unique experiences and perspectives, rather than as members of a particular gender category. Overall, this thesis hopes to offer a fresh and inclusive perspective that reflects the diversity of the world we live in and can help to promote greater understanding and acceptance of all people, regardless of their gender identity.

While traditionally *tapas* generally existed within a male ascetic paradigm, the framework of a *tapas* experience (story) needs no mention of gender. By removing gender from the equation, hopefully the practitioner is not limited by gender "norms" and expectations and a *tapas* genderless experience of transformation allows for greater inclusivity and representation within the inspired framework of a hero(ine)'s journey. The term "intersectionality" could be used to refer to the interconnectedness of different social identities and systems of oppression that are at play in the context of disrupting socially constructed gender norms and cognitive biases. For example, the use of the hero(ine)'s journey as a starting point for the *tapas* participant's story could be seen as an intersectional approach, as it recognizes the ways in which gender intersects with other identities

and social structures. Furthermore, presenting genderless stories as a means of contributing to a more equitable and inclusive society could be framed in terms of intersectionality, as it acknowledges the ways in which different forms of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.) intersect and create systems of inequality.

### **Four Functions of Mythology**

The precise characterization of myths and their underlying rationale has proven to be a complex and contested issue among scholars. Myths represent a collection of customary tales that a community recounts to convey its fundamental assumptions, convictions, values and often anxieties. Myths possess etiological utility, which involves clarifying the origins of the universe and its constituents. The objective of myths is to rationalize societal customs or legitimize the existence and jurisdiction of particular social institutions. Myths also address the conduct and existence of divine beings and supernatural powers that extend beyond mundane reality. The mythology of Hinduism holds significant cultural and religious significance within the Hindu community, serving as an integral component of their identity and worldview. The function of mythology in the West has been to provide a narrative framework for cultural values, beliefs, and practices.

Campbell observed that mythologies serve four main functions. Clarks writes that one of the functions “...is the cosmological function. Its purpose to put us in accord with nature and our surroundings.”<sup>125</sup> This function explains the universe: how it came to be and what it is made of. By understanding this, we understand our place within the universe. The second function is the sociological function which “puts us in accord with our society... [telling us] how we are supposed to act... and how to behave in our dealings with other people.”<sup>126</sup> These written and unwritten laws

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<sup>125</sup> Bernie Clark, *From the Gita to the Grail*, 3.

<sup>126</sup> Clark, xxxv-xxxvi

explain how people are to serve their society. The third function is the psychological function which “puts us in accord with our human nature and the inevitable stages of life.”<sup>127</sup> Last, but not least, is the fourth function; the mystical. This “helps us relate to the mystery that is existence itself.”<sup>128</sup>

Clark writes, “myths are maps to our inner landscapes.”<sup>129</sup> Each person constructs their own personal narrative and belief system, which guides their actions and decisions. This internalized framework, or map, can be selected consciously or subconsciously and shapes the course of their life. Our maps consist of mental models or patterns, which are utilized in our daily lives. If one is dissatisfied with their current circumstances, it may be due to following an ineffective map. Despite continuing to use the same map, an alternative path may be necessary for improvement. Clark writes, “The myths that guide us throughout our life are our life maps. We can choose to follow the maps that our culture has laid out before us, but many of these ancient maps no longer work.”<sup>130</sup> Obtaining a new map or altering one’s course may be a challenge but is feasible. If one can acknowledge their personal myths as a set of guiding principles, it may be possible to adopt novel or improved frameworks to facilitate more adept navigation of life’s challenges.

Through the practice of *tapas*, one can cultivate the discipline and self-awareness necessary to recognize their personal myths as a set of guiding principles. With this understanding, one may be able to undertake the challenging work of transforming their patterns and adopting new or improved frameworks that facilitate greater proficiency in navigating life’s obstacles.

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<sup>127</sup> Clark, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Clark, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Clark, xxxviii.

<sup>130</sup> Clark, 487.



## Yoga and Psychology

The intersection of psychology and yoga examines the psychological mechanisms underlying the practice of yoga and how it can promote mental health and well-being. This intersection recognizes that yoga can be a powerful tool for improving mental and emotional health, and that the practice of yoga can be informed and enriched by principles and techniques from psychology.

Psychology provides a complementary framework for understanding the underlying psychological processes that make yoga effective. It recognizes the role of the mind in shaping our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and provides tools for working with these processes to promote psychological health and well-being. There are many fields within psychology and there is much interest in studying the intersection of psychology (cognitive, depth, integral, neuropsychology, parapsychology, social, and transpersonal to name a few) with yoga. A potentially promising prospect lies in the further exploration of the intersectionality among *tapas*, the narrative structure, and psychology.

The crux of this thesis lies in exploring the intersection of *tapas*, the art of storytelling, and the potential for transformation that can occur via a character arc. Specifically, how they intersect and impact human behavior. Although understanding change and motivation are crucial components, the primary focus of this research is on the interplay between *tapas* and stories. The amalgamation of these two aspects holds great significance, especially for those seeking to utilize them to promote personal growth and development. Motivation plays a critical role in initiating and sustaining behavioral modifications, and it is a vital element that relates to human behavior and change in this context.

Motivation can be divided into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal factors that drive behavior, such as personal values, goals, and interests. *Tapas* is commonly experienced as an internally focused practice, but here I also examine the theory that when combined with our personal story it can perhaps be considered an external practice. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to external factors that drive behavior, such as rewards, punishments, and social pressure. Physical yoga practice, a physical journey (as opposed to a psychological one), and story (especially the hero's story) is putatively laden with pressures, challenges, expectations, judgment, and rewards.

When it comes to behavior change, it is important to understand both types of motivation and how they can be leveraged to facilitate change. Facilitating the alignment of an individual's behaviors and goals with their personal values and interests can serve to augment intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation can be cultivated by creating an environment that supports and facilitates behavior change.

Carl Jung wrote extensively about motivation in his theories of psychology. Jung, who lectured on the psychology of yoga and meditation between 1938-1940, believed that human behavior is driven by unconscious motivations that are often in conflict with conscious desires and aspirations. He also believed that understanding and integrating these unconscious motivations is critical for personal growth and psychological well-being. Much of his lectures on yoga and meditation were drawn from Heinrich Zimmer's writing and his "...mingling of yoga, Hinduism, and Mahâyâna Buddhism leads to a number of questions about Jung's approach to, understanding of, and differentiation among Eastern religions"<sup>131</sup> but it is clear Jung was genuinely interested in

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<sup>131</sup> C.G. Jung, Martin Liebscher, John Peck, and Heather McCartney, *Psychology of Yoga and Meditation: Lectures Delivered at ETH Zurich, Volume 6: 1938-1940*, Philemon Foundation Series, 22, (Princeton University Press, 2023), lvi.

the intersection of yoga and psychology. While there are some differences in the specific archetypes identified by Jung and Campbell, the overall concept of archetypes as universal symbols that shape human psychology and culture is a shared one.

The theory of archetypes by Jung heavily influenced Campbell's concept of the hero's journey. Archetypes are innate universal patterns of behavior and experience that are inherited from our ancestors and reside in the collective unconscious. Jung posited that these archetypes exert significant influence on human behavior and motivations, even when individuals are not cognizant of their impact.

Jung also developed the concept of the shadow, which refers to the unconscious parts of ourselves that we repress or deny because they are uncomfortable or unacceptable. He believed that these shadow aspects can also drive our behavior and motivations, even if we are not aware of them. Jung spoke specifically about *tapas* in a lecture in 1938 saying it is "used as an expression to represent the fructifying influence of attention hence is translated as 'creative heat'"<sup>132</sup> and during the same lecture quoted a hymn from the *Rg Veda* teaching that by using *tapas* one could "investigate the heart's impulse."<sup>133</sup>

The journey of *tapas* involves not only the physical practice of yoga but also a journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Jung's theories of psychology provide a rich framework for understanding this journey, as he believed that personal growth and transformation involve integrating unconscious motivations and aspects of the self. These investigations and integrations clearly interested Jung as he also wrote specifically about Kundalini Yoga.

In his book "The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung," Jung discussed the concept of Kundalini Yoga and its relationship to psychological

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<sup>132</sup> Jung, Liebscher, Peck, and McCartney 9

<sup>133</sup> Jung, Liebscher, Peck, and McCartney 9.

development. Jung saw Kundalini Yoga as a symbolic representation of the psychological process of individuation, which is the process of integrating unconscious aspects of the psyche into consciousness to achieve wholeness and self-realization. “Jung’s aim was to develop a cross-cultural comparative psychology of inner experience.”<sup>134</sup> He believed that the awakening of Kundalini energy was a metaphor for the emergence of unconscious contents into consciousness, leading to spiritual and psychological transformation.

The connection between Sigmund Freud’s work and *tapas* is limited and there has already been much scholarship about the difference between Freud and Jung, but one of the most significant differences between Freud and Jung’s theories is the role of the unconscious mind. While Freud saw the unconscious as a repository for repressed desires and memories, Jung saw it as a source of creative energy and spiritual insight. Freud’s work was primarily concerned with the human psyche and the nature of the unconscious mind. He developed psychoanalytic theory, which emphasizes the role of unconscious desires and conflict in shaping human behavior and personality. Freud did write, though, about suffering and yoga (and the search for happiness) in this 1930 book *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Civilization and Its Discontents). Freud writes that “...life is indeed difficult, and like most conventional society... we search for happiness but typically confound happiness with pleasure. [That] the universe is designed to frustrate our quest for happiness and to yield unhappiness more readily than happiness.”<sup>135</sup> He admitted that yoga generates the “happiness of quietness”<sup>136</sup> [but] it does so by “killing off the instincts.”<sup>137</sup>

One possible connection between *tapas* and Freud’s work is the idea of repression. In psychoanalytic theory, repression is the process by which the unconscious mind suppresses

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<sup>134</sup> C.G. Jung and Sonu Shamdasani, *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, (Princeton University Press, 1999), xxix.

<sup>135</sup> Jung, Liebscher, Peck, and McCartney, *Psychology of Yoga and Meditation*, 35

<sup>136</sup> Jung, Liebscher, Peck, and McCartney, 35.

<sup>137</sup> Jung, Liebscher, Peck, and McCartney, 35.

traumatic memories or unacceptable desires. This repression can lead to psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, or neurosis. Similarly, in the practice of *tapas*, individuals may use self-discipline and austerity to suppress their own desires and impulses to achieve great spiritual growth. This can involve denying oneself pleasure or comfort, which may be seen as a form of repression.

The practice of suppressing desires and impulses in Jainism is seen to achieve spiritual purity and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Jainism, according to Chapple, “attaches supreme importance to Yoga and meditation (*dhyāna*) as the means to spiritual advancement and emancipation.”<sup>138</sup> For Jains, the practice of non-action is seen to reduce the accumulation of karma. However, non-action should not be confused with passivity, as Jains also emphasize the importance of performing one’s duties and responsibilities in a non-violent and ethical manner. In contrast, a great example of action as it relates to yoga and *tapas* is Karma Yoga, as “Karma Yoga takes actions in the world very seriously. Karma Yoga requires effort and mindful purification through acts of personal sacrifice (*tapas, yajna*).”<sup>139</sup>

However, it is important to note that the goal of modern *tapas* is not to repress or deny one’s emotions and desires, but rather to understand and transcend them (although this was not the original goal of *tapas* practice). In this sense, modern *tapas* can be seen as a way of confronting and transforming unconscious patterns of behavior, rather than simply suppressing them.

Freud’s ideas about the importance of exploring and understanding the unconscious mind, as well as his emphasis on the role of sexuality and desires in human behavior, may have created a receptive cultural climate for the exploration of Eastern spiritual traditions like yoga in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His theories, though, about the unconscious mind, repression, and the

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<sup>138</sup> Christopher Key Chapple, *Yoga in Jainism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 7.

<sup>139</sup> Chapple, 244.

Oedipus complex may have had a profound influence on Western culture and psychology, but they did not directly address the practice or philosophy of yoga.

Some, though, make the connection between Freud's work and yoga. In Hellfried Krusche's book, *Freud and Yoga: Two Philosophies of Mind Compared*, Krusche and T.K.V. Desikachar (son and student of the famous T. Krishnamacharya, one of the forefathers of yoga in the modern world) discuss what steps we must take to change. Desikachar cites *Yoga Sūtra* 2.1 saying the practice of yoga must "develop our capacity for self-examination."<sup>140</sup>

To achieve this goal is called *sādhana*; and the effort needed to reach it is called *kriyā-yoga* (the yoga of action). "Action is required to experience the state of total attention."<sup>141</sup> One element of this is *tapas*. "*Tapas* is the identification of impurities in our psychosomatic system that cause problems. It is like an awakening: the discovery and use of potential that is not being tapped."<sup>142</sup> Step by step, *tapas* removes those impurities, which may be physical, emotional, or intellectual.

Desikachar goes on to say that over time "things happen that may affect or change our life as we are exposed to many influences. Cleaning our system requires discipline. This is the meaning of *tapas*."<sup>143</sup> We must continually question and investigate ourselves (*svādhyāya*). By putting in the effort with an inner attitude of *īśvara-praṇidhāna* (surrender) we first identify what is getting in the way to attain it. "One then should try slowly and carefully to remove these obstacles, constantly questioning one's own role and being open to either success or failure. We put in effort

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<sup>140</sup> Hellfried Krusche, and T.K.V Desikachar, and Anne-Marie Hodges, *Freud and Yoga: Two Philosophies of Mind Compared*, (North Point Press, 2014), 74.

<sup>141</sup> Krusche, and Desikachar, and Hodges, 74.

<sup>142</sup> Krusche, and Desikachar, and Hodges, 74.

<sup>143</sup> Krusche, and Desikachar, and Hodges, 74.

with hope. Continue to pursue your goals but acknowledge that you are not a perfect being. This is the spirit of yoga and of yoga practice leading to its highest goal: complete attention.”<sup>144</sup>

The first step towards real change is recognizing that one needs change and having clarity about this. Desikachar said that the second step is “...acknowledging that the trouble has a cause. Third step: accepting that one must come out of the troubled situation, and for this to happen, effort needs to be applied. The fourth step is deciding to put in this effort, whatever happens.”<sup>145</sup> Before we move through this examination of *tapas* and a personal transformation (or journey) guided by the framework of story, let’s first look at the intersection of psychology, yoga, motivation, and behavior change.

The intersection of psychology, yoga, and intrinsic motivation explores the psychological mechanisms of yoga that influence behavior and motivation. This emphasizes the connection between mind and body and promotes mindfulness, self-reflection, and self-transformation for better psychological health. Self-discipline and determination are crucial in this process, which is enhanced through a *tapas* practice. By combining yoga with mindfulness and self-reflection, individuals can develop a holistic approach to mental health that promotes self-awareness and emotional well-being.

In addition to Freud and Jung, Viktor E. Frankl developed Logo-therapy, a meaning-centered therapy that affirms our primary drive in life is the discovery and pursuit of what we personally find meaningful. Logo-therapy posits that when one finds meaning in their experience, they can endure any circumstances. In *The Psychology of Yoga* Georg Feuerstein writes “Where Freud only saw unconscious instinctually... Frankl also attributed a spiritual side to the

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<sup>144</sup> Krusche, and Desikachar, and Hodges, 75.

<sup>145</sup> Krusche, and Desikachar, and Hodges, 83.

unconscious. It is this spiritual force present in the unconscious that makes a person a ‘meaning-seeking’ creature.”<sup>146</sup>

Logotherapy is a type of psychotherapy that emphasizes the search for meaning and purpose in life to promote mental health and wellbeing. This approach to therapy is particularly relevant for people who are seeking to make changes in their lives, as it can help them identify and clarify their values, goals, and priorities, which in turn can serve as a source of motivation and direction. Frankl writes that “...mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still out to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become. Such a tension is inherent in the human being and therefore is indispensable to mental well-being.”<sup>147</sup>

One of the key principles of logotherapy is that humans have an innate need for meaning, and that this need can be satisfied through various activities and experiences that give our lives a sense of direction and intentionality and ultimately fulfillment. “According to logotherapy, this striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man.”<sup>148</sup> Logotherapy also can be especially helpful for people who are struggling with issues such as depression, anxiety, or existential crises, as it offers a framework for understanding and addressing the underlying causes of these problems. By focusing on the search for meaning and purpose, logotherapy can help individuals cultivate a sense of hope and optimism and develop a more positive and proactive outlook on life.

In summary, logotherapy is important for anyone who wants to change, as it provides a way to identify and pursue meaningful goals and values, which can serve as a source of motivation

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<sup>146</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *The Psychology of Yoga: Integrating Eastern and Western Approaches for Understanding the Mind*, (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2013), 98.

<sup>147</sup> Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 85.

<sup>148</sup> Frankl, 80.



and direction in the face of challenges and obstacles. What is the exploration and realization of attainable possibilities, though, when you combine these principles with the practice of *tapas*?

There are several ways in which the modern practice of *tapas* intersects with the principles of logotherapy:

1. Personal growth and development: Both *tapas* and logotherapy emphasize the importance of personal growth and development. In yoga, the practice of *tapas* is seen to cultivate inner strength and discipline, which can help individuals grow and evolve on a personal level. Similarly, logotherapy emphasizes the importance of personal growth and development as a means of find meaning and purpose in life.
2. Self-discipline: *Tapas* is often described as a practice of self-discipline, as it involves pushing oneself to engage in challenging physical and mental practices. Similarly, logotherapy emphasizes the importance of self-discipline as a means of achieving personal growth and development.
3. Find meaning and purpose: Both *tapas* and logotherapy emphasize the importance of finding meaning and purpose in life. In yoga, the practice of *tapas* is seen as a way to connect with one's inner self and cultivate a sense of purpose and meaning. Similarly, logotherapy helps individuals identify and pursue their unique sense of purpose and meaning.
4. Overcoming obstacles: *Tapas* involves pushing oneself beyond one's perceived limits, which can help individuals overcome physical and mental obstacles. Similarly, logotherapy helps individuals overcome psychological obstacles that may be preventing them from finding meaning and purpose in their lives.

Overall, while *tapas* and logotherapy come from different cultural and intellectual traditions, they share some common ground in their focus on personal growth, self-discipline, and finding meaning and purpose in life. *Tapas* can be seen as a means of cultivating the qualities and values that are central to logotherapy, and both practices can complement and support each other in the pursuit of personal growth and development.

From an Integral Psychology perspective, *tapas* can be seen as one of the practices or tools used to promote personal growth and development. It can be considered part of an overall integral approach to self-improvement, which emphasizes the integration of multiple perspectives and

dimensions of human experience. Additionally, *tapas* can be seen as a way of cultivating and strengthening the willpower and self-control necessary for individual metamorphosis. By practicing *tapas*, individuals learn to overcome physical and mental obstacles, which can be applied to other areas of their lives as well.

Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst, and philosopher emphasized the power of language in shaping the unconscious. Lacan's work has made significant contributions to psychoanalytic theory, introducing the idea of the "symbolic order",<sup>149</sup> the cultural and social symbols that shape our comprehension of the world and our identity, all of which are influenced by language – with his insights on language, the unconscious, and the self also having an impact on literary theory, linguistics, and cultural studies.

*Tapas* and Lacan's work intersect in their emphasis on discipline, austerity, and self-formation. Lacan argued that "the self is constructed through language and social relations,"<sup>150</sup> and stressed the importance of "discipline and self-control in the formation of the self, particularly in the process of overcoming what he called the *imaginary* aspects of the self,"<sup>151</sup> while *tapas* cultivates discipline and concentration to overcome obstacles to spiritual growth. Both suggest that self-discipline and introspection can help individuals develop self-awareness and overcome unconscious forces that shape behavior.

*Tapas* and Lacanian psychoanalysis also intersect in their emphasis on the transformative power of discomfort, as both suggest that growth and transformation necessitate enduring discomfort and overcoming obstacles to achieve greater levels of self-awareness and self-mastery.

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<sup>149</sup> Adrian Johnston, "Jacques Lacan", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), (Spring 2023 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/lacan/>, accessed 2.28.23.

<sup>150</sup> Johnston, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/lacan/>, accessed 2.28.23.

<sup>151</sup> Johnston, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/lacan/>, accessed 2.28.23.

Lacan also argued that the process of self-transformation often involves confronting and overcoming uncomfortable or painful experiences to achieve a deeper understanding of oneself.

Through an analysis of narrative techniques that demonstrate the potential of *tapas* to effect change, alongside an examination of the linguistic mechanisms that inform our comprehension of this practice, scholarly inquiry has revealed a compelling link between *Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras* and Bhartṛhari's philosophy of language. This insight was first postulated by author Harold Coward, whose research on the subject serves as a foundation for subsequent academic investigations. Bhartṛhari was a renowned philosopher of language in ancient India, and his work has influenced various fields, including linguistics, literature, and philosophy.

Bhartṛhari's philosophy of language centers around the idea that language and meaning are inseparable. He argued that language is not just a tool for communication, but it is also a means of knowledge and a means of achieving liberation. His work explores the relationship between language, consciousness, and reality. Language and storytelling can be used to convey the practice of *tapas*. Bhartṛhari's philosophy of language provides insights into how language shapes our understanding of reality and how stories can be used to convey deeper meanings.

According to Coward, in *yoga and psychology*, "Words convey knowledge if they are true and not deceptive or confused. When a clear-minded person speaks of something that has been seen or inferred, that knowledge is transferred via the hearing of a spoken word to the mind of the listener, and verbal communication (*āgama*) has taken place. Authority comes into *āgama* on the side of the hearer, who has to accept the knowledge of the speaker as authoritative since he has not had the first-hand experience of perception or inference."<sup>152</sup>As all teachings of yoga were

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<sup>152</sup> Howard G. Coward, *Yoga and Psychology: Language, Memory, and Mysticism* (Suny Series in Religious Studies, State University of New York Press, 2002), 12-13.

originally orally transmitted from teacher (*guru*) to student (*chātra/chātrā*), language remains such a critical component of the discourse on the phenomenology of the history of yoga. Things do change, though, and the process of receiving written language involves visual perception, decoding symbols, understanding grammar and syntax, and interpreting contextual and stylistic cues to comprehend the intended meaning. Additionally, written language can also convey emotions, tone, and intent using punctuation, formatting, and other stylistic devices.

Language in yoga texts and stories helps convey the practice of *tapas*. Storytelling is also used to communicate the transformative power of *tapas* and language plays a role in shaping our understanding of this practice. Language shapes our understanding of reality and stories can be used to convey deeper meanings. One area of agreement between Bharṭṛhari, Freud, and Jung is their recognition of the power of language to shape our perceptions and experiences. However, Bharṭṛhari differed from Freud and Jung in his emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of language and the power of language to reveal the ultimate reality of the self. In contrast, Freud and Jung were primarily concerned with the psychological dimensions of language and the role of language in shaping our behavior and experiences. Additionally, Freud and Jung developed their theories of psychology based on Western cultural traditions, while Bharṭṛhari's philosophy of language was rooted in Indian cultural traditions.

## ***Tapas* and Storytelling: The Intersection**

The intersection of spirituality, yoga's practice of *tapas*, and the hero(ine)'s journey can be understood through their shared emphasis on growth, transformation, and self-discovery.

In Deepak Chopra's 2023 book *Living in the Light*, he "reframes" the eight limbs of yoga to eight stages of intelligent transformation. He reframes the definition of *tapas* in the *niyamas* to Emotional Intelligence. Chopra maps a new thirty-day Royal Yoga journey, of which *tapas*

(understandably) is a part of. Chopra writes that this *niyama* is about “transforming your old emotional habits. In classic Yoga, the lasting impressions that rob us of choice are like seeds that must be burned away. The burning is done by awareness itself. Old forms must be destroyed to make room for the new. Simply by focusing your awareness, you can begin to burn away the *vrittis* (modifications of the mind) that block your true self. It takes dedication to achieve transformation. Focus is a necessity.”<sup>153</sup>

Spirituality often involves seeking a deeper understanding of the self and the universe and cultivating a sense of connection to something greater than oneself. This can involve many practices in addition to *tapas* including meditation, prayer, and contemplation which are aimed at developing a greater sense of awareness, compassion, and inner peace.

As defined earlier in this thesis, yoga’s practice of *tapas* refers to the discipline and effort required to undertake a sustained practice of yoga. *Tapas* involves pushing oneself beyond one’s limits and cultivating a sense of inner strength and determination.

The hero(ine)’s journey is a narrative archetype that describes the process of transformation and growth that a hero(ine) undergoes through a series of trials and challenges. This is seen in this thesis as a character arc. Ananthnarayanan and Pethe write that “the Yogic map of a hero’s journey is to go within and clear up the *upādāna* (material of any kind) that is distorted with *avidyā* (ignorance) and causing *duḥkha* (suffering) for oneself and inducing actions that are *adharma* (actions that cause sorrow for oneself and one’s context and the world one lives in).”<sup>154</sup> Through spiritual practices like a *tapas* journey, individuals can develop greater self-awareness and

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<sup>153</sup> Deepah Chopra, *Living in the Light: Yoga for Self-Realization*, (New York: Harmony Books, 2023), 47.

<sup>154</sup> Raghu Ananthnarayanan and Sanjyot Pethe, “The *dhīra* -The Inner Journey of the Hero”, 9.

cultivate inner strength and resilience. The hero(ine)'s journey similarly involves facing challenges and overcoming obstacles to discover one's true potential.

One framework for the human journey that incorporates visionary science, spirituality, and yogic principles is the *cakra* system. The *cakra* system is a system of energy centers in the body that correspond to different aspects of human experience and consciousness. This system can be used to understand the journey of human growth and transformation. The *cakra* system also provides a lens through which to understand the challenges and opportunities that arise at each stage of our *tapas* journey, as well as the practices and tools that can support us in moving through stages of our journey with greater ease and grace. The *cakra* system is considered part of the subtle body.

According to this system, the body is composed of three main components: the physical body, the subtle body, and the causal. The physical body is the tangible aspect of our being, made up of flesh, bone, and organs. The subtle body is the energetic aspect of our being, consisting of channels, energy centers, and subtle energies like *prāṇa* (life force) and *kuṇḍalinī-sākti* (latent spiritual energy). The causal body is the most subtle and highest aspect of our being, representing pure consciousness or pure awareness. The *cakra* system is an important component of the subtle body. Through practices like *tapas*, we can work to balance and activate the *cakras*, and cultivate greater awareness. This can support us in our hero(ine)'s journey of personal growth and transformation, helping us to connect more deeply with our inner selves and the world around us.

Christopher Vogler dedicates a chapter in the 25<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary edition of his book, *The Writer's Journey*, to applying the *cakra* system to stories. Vogler believes that stories “are designed to alter the vibrational rate of the viewer or reader.”<sup>155</sup>“The best of them aim to fine-tune

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<sup>155</sup> Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, 439.

our vibrations, encouraging us to feel more in synch with our world, more in touch with our feelings and more aware of the higher possibilities of consciousness. A good story can open us up to becoming more fully human.”<sup>156</sup>

Vogler writes that “the *chakra* system can be viewed as a ladder of increasingly refined forms of energy, roughly corresponding with the Hero’s journey.”<sup>157</sup> Vogler wholeheartedly writes that the *cakra* system can help writers to create characters who are more fully developed and grounded in reality: more fully realized and relatable. For example, Vogler suggests that the root *cakra*, which is associated with basic survival need and the physical body, can be used to create characters who are grounded and connected to their physical selves. The sacral *cakra*, which is associated with creativity, can be used to create characters who are expressive and passionate. The heart *cakra*, which is associated with love and connection, can be used to create characters who are empathetic and caring.

The relationship between the *cakra* system and *tapas* practice stems from the association of various *cakras* with distinctive attributes or qualities, which can be cultivated through the practice of *tapas*. Through mindfulness, conscious control of breathing (*prāṇāyāma*), meditation, and chanting a practitioner can draw their attention to how emotions are felt in different parts of the body. For example, the first *cakra*, located at the base of the spine, is *mūlādhāra*. *Mūlādhāra* is associated with the qualities of stability, grounding, and security. By practicing *tapas*, one can focus on this *cakra* and conceivably develop these qualities within oneself. Similarly, the third *cakra* (*maṇipūra*), located at the solar plexus, is associated with the qualities of willpower, determination, and self-control. By engaging in the practice of *tapas*, individuals have the potential to cultivate these aforementioned qualities.

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<sup>156</sup> Vogler, 440.

<sup>157</sup> Vogler, 454.

Vogler concludes by writing “When you tell a story, the audience should feel differently at the end. Joseph Campbell spoke of ‘an amplification of consciousness’ [and] the *chakra* system points to the possibility that you can consciously set out to improve your vibrational rate, and live in your world with more harmony, ease of movement, and access to all the possibilities of your mind and body.”<sup>158</sup> Experiencing a sense of unimpeded access to the full range of one’s physical and cognitive capabilities can prove to be a valuable asset when embarking on a three-month *tapas* experience aimed at attaining a more integrated way of living, as it may facilitate the unlocking of one’s complete potential and foster a heightened sense of self-actualization. I recommend a three-month commitment to have time to practice, cultivate, and hopefully embrace a new behavior as it takes at least two months to form a new habit. This can vary significantly depending on the individual. Factoring in time to develop self-awareness, acquire key insights, and make behavior changes is a process and it will take effort (and some setbacks) to contemplate the process and reap the rewards.

When we feel limited or restricted in our abilities, whether physically, mentally, or emotionally, we may hold ourselves back from pursuing our goals and dreams. A *tapas* practice can help us to push past our perceived limitations and access the full range of our abilities. By living more fully in wholeness through a *tapas* practice, we can develop a greater sense of self-awareness and self-acceptance. We can learn to embrace our strengths and weaknesses, and work to improve upon areas where we may be struggling. This can help us to live more authentically and with greater purpose and direction.

Additionally, by tapping into the full potential of our minds and bodies, we may be able to achieve greater physical and mental health, as well as increased creativity, productivity, and

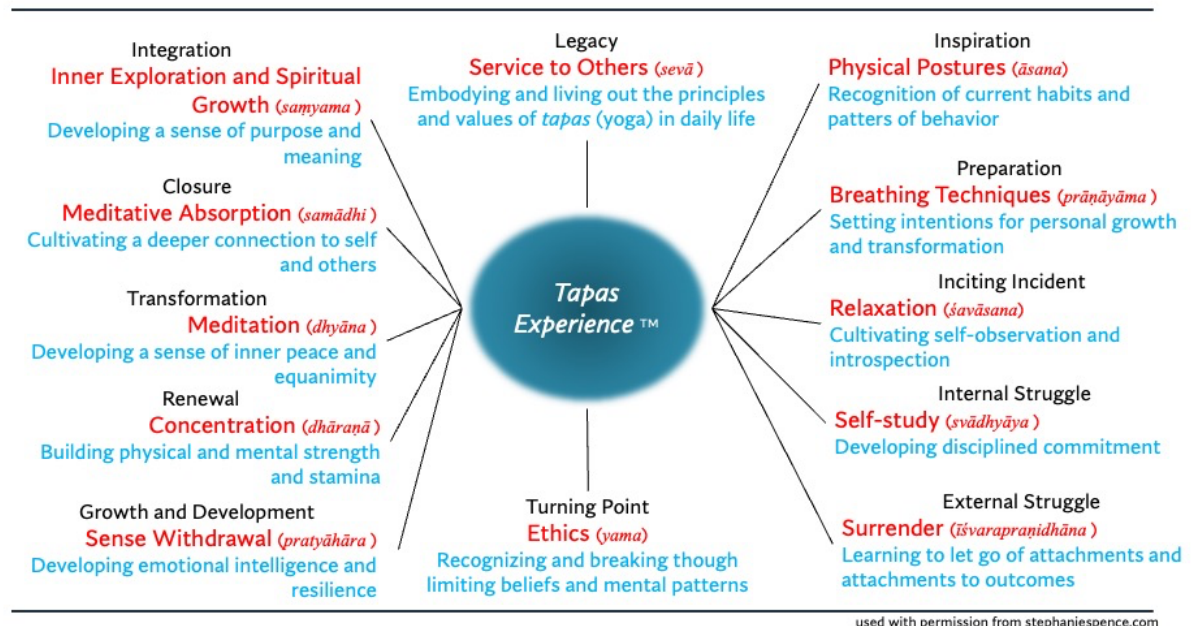
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<sup>158</sup> Vogler, 456-457.



overall well-being. A *tapas* practice can help us to develop greater focus and clarity, as well as cultivate inner strength and resilience. Feeling like we have limitless access to what our minds and bodies can do can be extremely valuable.

Overall, the intersection of spirituality, yoga’s practice of *tapas*, and the hero(ine)’s journey points to the importance of cultivating inner strength, resilience, and a sense of purpose to achieve personal growth and transformation. Given the understanding of the overall intersection, I’ve developed a model for a new journey, a reframing of a twelve-step hero(ine) journey – what I call the *tapas experience* [Figure 5].



*Figure 5 – Tapas Experience Model*

My newly created *tapas experience* is a unique approach to personal growth and transformation that combines the principles of *tapas* in yoga with the character arc in storytelling. The journey includes twelve steps, starting with inspiration and preparation, where the practitioner sets intentions for personal growth and transformation and develops discipline and self-control through breathing techniques and physical postures.

The practitioner then chooses a challenge and/or eliminates an outdated tool (obstacle) that sets the story in motion and prompts them to act. They face internal and external conflicts, test their resilience and determination, and develop emotional intelligence and resilience through growth and development.

The journey can lead to renewal, transformation, and closure, where the practitioner sheds old patterns and habits to become a changed person, integrates the lessons learned into their daily life, and leaves a lasting impact on the world by embodying the principles and values of *tapas* and yoga in daily life. Through this unique approach, the practitioner can experience a profound transformation, developing a sense of inner peace, equanimity, purpose, and meaning, and becomes a wiser and stronger person as a result. What follows is the twelve steps of my *tapas* experience.

1. Inspiration: The practitioner (character) experiences a spark of inspiration, leading them to embark on a personal journey of growth and transformation. There is a recognition of current habits and patterns of behavior. Physical postures (*āsanas*).
2. Preparation: The practitioner (character) prepares themselves mentally and physically for the challenges that lie ahead, much like the practice of *tapas* in yoga, which involves developing discipline and self-control. Setting intentions for personal growth and transformation. Breathing techniques (*prāṇāyāma*).
3. Inciting Incident: The practitioner (character) is presented with (or chooses) a challenge or obstacle that sets the story in motion and prompts them to act. (Example: Give up something that is understood to be a “tool” that is no longer working and/or something that is understood to be unhealthy for three months. Attempt a yoga posture or practice (like meditation, etc.) that has not been attempted and/or been elusive (also for the three-month duration). Make a commitment to yourself and perhaps your yoga teacher (for accountability). Cultivating self-observation and introspection. Relaxation (*śavāsana* or *sukhāsana*).
4. Internal Struggle: The practitioner (character) faces internal obstacles and opposition as they pursue their goals, testing their resilience and determination. Developing discipline and commitment. Self-study (*svādhyāya*).

5. External Conflict: The practitioner (character) faces external obstacles and opposition as they pursue their goals, testing their resilience and determination. Learning to let go of attachments and attachments to outcomes. Surrender (*īśvarapraṇidhāna*).
6. Turning Point: The practitioner (character) experiences a moment of realization or insight that shifts their perspective and changes the course of their journey. Recognizing and breaking through limiting beliefs and mental patterns. Observances: Ethics (*yama*) and Restraint (*niyama*).
7. Growth and Development: The practitioner (character) continues to grow and develop, learning new skills and gaining wisdom along the way. This parallels the principle of a challenging *āsana* practice (physical postures) in yoga. Developing emotional intelligence and resilience. Sense withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*).
8. Renewal: Following the path (with regular practice, study, and discipline) the practitioner (character) is taken deeper toward embodied wholeness. With a spiritual routine (*sādhana*) that seeks to embody the qualities of self-awareness, the journey of self-referral shifts the practitioner's experience from external references (such as identification with labels and/or their position in society, possessions, and the need to try and satisfy the ego) to an internal reference of stillness, listening to and trusting intuition, and a spiritual life that may include a higher counsel. This stage is marked by self-referral. Building physical and mental strength and stamina. Concentration (*dhāraṇā*).
9. Transformation: The practitioner (character) undergoes a profound transformation, shedding old patterns and habits to become a better person. This is like the concept of pratipakṣa-bhāvanam in yoga – YS II.33 or cultivating positive thoughts and actions. While fostering progressive growth of consciousness the practitioner embodies yoga principles including this and others like *ahiṃsā* (harmlessness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). Developing a sense of inner peace and equanimity. Meditation (*dhyāna*).
10. Closure: The practitioner (character) brings closure to their journey, resolving any outstanding conflicts and tying up loose ends (perhaps in ceremony). Cultivating a deeper connection to self and others. Meditative absorption (*samādhi*).
11. Integration: The practitioner (character) integrates the lessons learned on their journey into their daily life, becoming a wiser and stronger person as a result. This is like the concept of *samādhi* in yoga, an all-complete condition of balance and repose, concentration and meditation or achieving a state of union and inner peace. Developing a sense of purpose and meaning. Inner Exploration and Spiritual Growth (*saṃyama*).
12. Legacy: The practitioner (character) leaves a lasting impact on the world, inspiring others and leaving a positive legacy for future generations. Embodying and living out the principles and values of *tapas* (and yoga) in daily life. Service to others (*sevā*).

The *tapas experience* outlined above offers a roadmap for individuals to discover their true potential and become the best version of themselves. We all can update our map. As Clark writes, “Joseph Campbell felt that what most people were looking for was not a purpose for their life... they were not looking for meaning. They were seeking a deep *experience* of life! This he named *bliss*... a deep joy that comes from being fully alive, from following the map that leads you to what you most enjoy – that which you do with *en-joy-ment*. This goes beyond purpose or meaning to wholeness.”<sup>159</sup>

While map apps on our smartphones can help us navigate the physical terrain, they do not provide us with the tools to navigate the internal landscape of our own personal growth and transformation. This is where my proposed *tapas experience* can be incredibly helpful. While a *tapas experience* can be a powerful tool for personal growth and transformation, also having a teacher or mentor on this journey can provide invaluable guidance and support. Just like how a skilled hiking guide can help us navigate a challenging trail, a teacher or mentor can help us navigate the ups and downs of our internal landscape. They can provide us with the tools, knowledge, and perspective that we need to deepen our understanding of ourselves, overcome obstacles, and ultimately reach our goals. With the guidance of a teacher or mentor, we can embark on a *tapas experience* with greater clarity, confidence, and purpose.

Similarly, yoga’s practice of *tapas* involves cultivating discipline, perseverance, and self-control in the pursuit of a goal. This can be incredibly valuable when undertaking an arduous journey (like a dedicated three-month *tapas experience*), as it can help us stay focused and committed even in the face of adversity and help us develop the resilience and inner strength we need to keep going.

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<sup>159</sup> Bernie Clark, *From the Gita to the Grail*, 7, 461-2.

This *tapas experience* can also provide us with the tools and support we need to undertake a transformative journey with intention and purpose, and to emerge from that journey renewed. By embracing these tools, we can navigate the challenges of our journey with greater clarity, confidence, and resilience, and ultimately achieve the self-transformation goals we have set for ourselves. Ananthnarayanan and Pethe write “The inner journey of the *dhīra* is not a narrative of accomplishment. It is a narrative of a search for... the ultimate source of Light. When one is anchored in this primal Consciousness, engagement with one’s world takes on a quality that is fundamentally different from the ‘normal’ ways. One becomes the vessel through which Intelligence acts.”<sup>160</sup> The implementation of this *tapas experience* might facilitate a profound transformation and may ultimately lead to the resolution of the participant’s story arc, highlighting the potency of yoga as a tool for personal growth and evolution.

## Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore the idea that for humanity to reach a higher level of self-awareness, individuals must drastically change. My thesis suggests that to achieve lasting change, individuals must embark on an inward journey of personal growth and transformation. I call this journey a *tapas experience*. I also argue that individuals, regardless of gender, embarking on a *tapas experience* (within the practice of yoga) can achieve a more peaceful and mindful existence, positively affecting relationships and external experiences.

What underpins my proposed *tapas experience* [genderless] are two types of individual journeys: the hero’s journey and the heroine’s journey. Using the history and significance of *tapas*, stories and storytelling methods from different cultures, the art of storytelling and the character arc

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<sup>160</sup> Raghu Ananthnarayanan and Sanjyot Pethe, “The *dhīra* -The Inner Journey of the Hero”, 27.

were used to further and deepen my proposed *tapas experience*. I've taken and researched and incorporated elements from these journeys and yoga to suggest that personal transformation is possible. It is my hope that this inclusive and diverse perspective, my *tapas experience*, will lead to a greater understanding and acceptance of all people. However, much more scientific work is required to further build out my *tapas experience* model.

I propose that a daily modern *tapas* practice be used for a set amount of time. This proposed three-month experience can look like what I have come to call the *tapas experience*: after the call to adventure there could be a self-imposed challenge (physically and/or mentally) that looks a lot like focused presence, self-reflection, and growth. An uncomfortable dark middle that leads to change, self-transformation, and resolution. A powerful, healthy resolution that leaves the participant feeling uplifted and inspired, while also reflecting the practitioner's growth and transformation.

This thesis explores the importance of storytelling and its connection to human nature. It emphasizes the significance of stories and how yoga and the practice of *tapas* can help in self-observation, and how understanding this and the fundamental principles of yoga psychology and effective storytelling individuals can create change. By examining and understanding a character arc, change is possible and through that individuals could conceive of themselves as being the protagonist in their own life story. This thesis argues that our life story can be improved by using *tapas* and the framework of storytelling effectively. It explains the importance of a self-imposed challenge and how it can be used to invoke self-transformation in one's life.

After gathering these sources, I am optimistic that my model will work and I believe the next logical step will be that further investigation is warranted to explore the potential benefits of incorporating *tapas* into the narrative structure of storytelling, with a suggested one-year IRB-

approved study to evaluate the physical, emotional, and personal effects of this intersection (see Appendix for additional IRB details).

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Potential IRB Study

What could a year-long IRB study look like at the intersection of my new framework of the hero(ine)'s story, a modern yoga *tapas* practice, and its physical, mental, emotional, and philosophical benefit?

#### Research Question

What are the physical, mental, emotional, and philosophical benefits of yoga's modern practice of *tapas* within a genderless hero(ine)'s journey narrative framework as it relates to self-transformation?

#### Research Design

1. **Research Approach:** The research approach for this study will be qualitative, which will enable us to gather in-depth insights about the experiences and perspectives of participants regarding the physical, mental, emotional, and philosophical benefits of yoga's modern practice of *tapas* within a genderless "hero(ine)'s journey" narrative framework.
2. **Research Participants:** The participants for this study will be individuals who practice yoga, with a focus on those who are invited to learn and participate in a new framework of a practice of *tapas*. Participants will be recruited through online forums, social media platforms, and yoga studios. We will aim to recruit a diverse sample of participants, including individuals of different ages, genders, races, and yoga experience levels.
3. **Data Collection:** Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with participants. The interviews will be conducted online, via video conferencing software. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interviews will be conducted using an interview guide, which will include open-ended questions designed to elicit information about the physical, mental, emotional, and philosophical benefits of yoga's modern practice of *tapas* within a genderless hero(ine)'s journey narrative framework.
4. **Data Analysis:** The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data. The analysis will involve the identification of patterns and themes within the data, which



- will be coded and categorized. The codes and categories will then be reviewed and refined to identify key themes.
5. Ethical Considerations: This study will be submitted for IRB approval to ensure that ethical considerations are addressed. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and they will be informed about the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study. Participants will be assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and all identifying information will be removed from the data before analysis.
  6. Timeline: This study will be conducted over the course of one year. Recruitment of participants will take place in the first three months of the study, data collection will take place over the following six months, and data analysis and report writing will take place over the final three months of the study.

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