

Yoga and the Honey Bee



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Introduction

The starting point of this project is a personal one, I have been an initiate of the gynocentric European shamanic path; The Path of Pollen and of the Siddha Yoga tradition for over a decade. Both paths have given me a great deal and unsurprisingly their paths often meet and intersect. The project will briefly reveal how common threads run between Tantra and shamanism.

This project explores the relationship between the honey bee (*Apis Mellifica*) and yoga traditions, both from a philosophical and practical perspective. I will examine scriptural references to the bee, honey and nectar and consider why the bee has been chosen as a symbol for spiritual teachings for so many centuries. In this exploration I will examine why the honey bee is so widely used in these ancient sacred texts and what this means in terms of our relationship to the honey bee. What does this suggest about the honey bee? What can we learn from these winged beings? I will also consider some of the practices that relate to the life of the honey bee. This will include reference to the little known European shamanic tradition; The Path of Pollen which has much in common with the esoteric yogic traditions. (Appendix 1)

The Threads that link Yoga with the Honey Bee.

'Where the bees can live, man can live.'

It is widely accepted in popular culture today that the honey bees are in trouble, many people campaign on behalf of the bees, raising awareness of their importance in our lives as without them our reality would appear very different as there would be a dramatic decrease in food available and our landscape would look very different without these busy pollinators. There has been research to explore the reasons behind their decline, which although isn't the purpose of this project is worth mentioning. The term Colony Collapse Disorder has been used to describe the vast number of bees dying or disappearing from hives without obvious reason. There is a large consensus as to the reasons impacting the Bees that may explain this phenomenon. Firstly, the increased use of pesticides in agriculture and also stronger chemicals used by gardeners are aimed at destroying and damaging the insects reproductive and neurological functioning. Secondly, the increased use of mobile phones and internet; these electromagnetic energy waves interrupt the bees sensitive navigation systems and it is thought that the Bees are unable to go about their natural life pattern using the sun for bearings and communicating with one another when such strong harmful rays are being emitted.

Another reason why Bees are disappearing, perhaps like many animal and plant species, is that we have lost our harmonious connection and relationship with them. It is rare that when we sit down to enjoy our honey on toast that we offer thanks and heart felt gratitude to the bees for their sweet offering. It takes a hive of bees to fly over 55,000 miles to make one pound of honey and in her lifetime the average worker honey bee will make 1/12th of a teaspoon of honey. The bees also make the honey for themselves and this is often forgotten as enthusiastic bee keeper's focus on honey yield with business opportunities in mind, forgetting that this is a bee colonies pantry to get them through a winter that can be five months long. Many modern bee keepers will feed the bees fondant or syrup made from refined sugar but this is a poor substitute as it does not contain the essential and complex mix of minerals and enzymes that honey consists of. Each colony has its own wisdom and apothecary

and selects the pollens that the hive needs for health and harmony and these subtleties cannot be easily replaced.

What is fascinating is that the plight of the honey bee reflects beautifully our own human plight in many ways. The honey bees hold up a stark and honest mirror for us to reflect upon. In this age of Kali Yuga we have forgotten our own knowledge of how to connect with ourselves and others, how to look after our physical bodies and minds by ingesting food and information that is nourishing and uplifting. Our environments, for the most part, are toxic and damaged. Many humans exist on processed tamasic foods that leave us depleted in energy, and take in or digest information from the media that often leaves people feeling anxious, frightened, depressed and dis-empowered. This is why Yoga, including Ayurveda (traditional Indian health system), has so much to offer us in modern society to help us bring ourselves back to a deeper connection with ourselves and the world around us. Like Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) we have reached a point of dis- ease and lack of balance and harmony within our own colonies or communities. Thankfully there are increasing numbers of Bee keepers who are adopting more natural methods of beekeeping which do not impose or interfere with the hives natural balance and these methods show that Bees are more resistant to disease and able to survive the winter. Likewise there has been in recent years renewed interest in Yoga and other holistic health systems that support us in bringing ourselves back into balance both individually, collectively and globally.

Honey

Honey is made from the nectar that the bees gather from flowers and trees. Through an alchemical process inside their bodies this nectar is transformed into honey. When we think of bees we think primarily of honey and there are plenty of references to honey within yogic scriptures. The Sanskrit word for honey is *madhu*. Throughout the ages bees and honey have inspired Vedic writers and poets; hence the term 'sacred bees'. However, honey is just the starting point, the connection between the honey bee and yoga runs along a much deeper and complex vein. In the scriptures it is often difficult to know when honey or madhu means honey from bees or the sacred drink soma (see Appendix 2) particularly in relation to sacrificial rites. This thread of ambiguity runs constantly, is the term honey or madhu used as a physical substance or as a metaphor?

In Hinduism honey taking is seen as a spiritual activity, it is said that Hindu's hold a piece of the sacred herb Tulsi or Holy Basil when taking honey from the hive (cited Ransome 2010, p45).This tradition links to Krishna who is said to have changed his beloved to the plant .

Honey is considered to be 'death overcoming' as it does not age or decompose. Like Hinduism, other cultures have also highly regarded the honey bee, for example the Egyptian culture. Honey that has been found in the Pyramids of ancient Egypt is still intact, which reinforces its claim as a life giving substance that enhances longevity.

Honey is mentioned within the central text **Hatha Yoga Pradipika** (1972 v62 chap1) as a conducive food for yogi's to eat. There is also guidance in the less known **Brihad-~Aranyaka Upanishan** in the use of honey in ceremony (cited Hume 6.3.13 p167). It is likely that our ancestors revered and honoured honey and used it primarily as a substance for ritual use such as in abhisheks, where in temples, honey is poured over the deities in a ritual called Madhu abhisheka rather than as a general food substance that is taken for granted as can be the tendency in modern society.

Scriptures

*'...let honey
overflow in
infinite
tongues,
and let the ocean become
a hive.'*

(Pablo Nerua 'Ode to the Bee' cited by Buxton 2006)

In Hinduism, honey is regarded as one of the five elixirs of immortality (Panchamrita). The Vedas and other ancient literature mention the use of honey as a great medicinal and health food. 'The physical body houses the soul as the hive houses the colony.' (Ransome 2010, p46)

In the **Pratyabhiyana** (cited by Singh, 2013 p9) honey is used to describe Shiva's state as he realizes the splendor and joy of his pure state:

'He (Siva) Himself full of joy enhanced by the honey of the three corners of his heart, viz: Iccha or will, Jnana or knowledge, Kriya or action. Raising up His face to gaze at (His) own splendor is called Sakti.'

The **Rig Veda** is the oldest Vedic text (estimated to have been written between 2000 and 3000 BC) which comprises of a thousand hymns giving guidance on outer and inner rituals and practice's. Amongst these hymns are many references to honey, nectar and sweetness.

*Let every wind that blows drop honey
Let the rivers and streams recreate honey
Let all our medicines turn honey
Let the dawn and evening be full of honey
Let the dark particles be converted to honey
Our nourisher, this sky above, be full of honey
Let our trees be honey
Let the Sun be honey
Let our cows secrete honey*

(Rig Veda 1:90:6-8 cited Pelikan 1992)

This verse points to the interconnectedness and vastness of existence and the mortal wish that every aspect of one's experience be sweet or joyful, that as yogic practitioners we may transcend the bondage of our minds or ego state to reside in a state of intoxication of union.

Also from the Rig-Veda:

*My tongue hath honey at the tip, and sweetest honey at the root.
Thou yieldest to my wish and will, and shalt be mine and only mine.
My coming in is honey sweet, and honey sweet my going forth;
My voice and words are sweet: I fain would be like honey in my look*

*Around thee have I girt a zone of sugar-cane to banish hate
That thou may'st be in love with me, my darling, never to depart.*

Here we see honey being used as a symbol of guidance in ones practice to sweeten ones thoughts, words and actions. It also resonates with the Bhakti aspect of yoga whereby devotion is the energy behind the practice.

These verses are subject to a wide range of interpretations. Mead is also mentioned in the Rig Veda. In European history mead was usually made by monks who had taken vows and resided in monasteries. It is a drink made from honey, that although now known as a traditional alcoholic beverage may well have been valued for its medicinal qualities as well as joy bringing qualities. In the Rig Veda mead, honey and the sacred drink Soma are used interchangeably. This also raises the question of the cross cultural connections between Indian and European cultures.

'Make the sweet libations ready and bring the beautiful bright juice to Vaya God, as our priest, e thou the first to drink it: We give thee of the mead to make thee joyful.' 'Meads, bright glittering juice- that dwells on mountains.'

Rig Veda Book 5 XL111 (Cited by Pelikan 1992)

The countless reference to sweetness and nectar are of course a metaphor for the fruits of spiritual advancement and effort. Bees serve as images of the miraculous interconnectedness of life; they secrete the golden essence of life while living in an intricate cellular structure.

'Even as two lips that with the mouth speak honey, even as two breasts that nourish our existence.'
Rig Veda Book 2 Hymn XL1 (6) (Cited by Pelikan 1992, p157)

Honey is a symbol of nourishment and life sustaining qualities. It is also used to describe all sweetness; this extends to include cow's milk, cows being revered in Indian culture. I think this can be regarded on different levels; the sweetness of taste, of spiritual development and experience but also the mystical connection to the Mother Goddess who sustains and nourishes us. This verse may also allude to the duality between the earth, represented by the cow's milk and the sky, represented by the bee, when blended the perception of duality is recognized as an illusion and transcended.

'The milk is blended with the honey of the bee...'
Rig Veda Hymn 1V (Cited by Pelikan 1992, p393)

In the Rig Veda the Asvins or twin horse men, steer the chariot which is called Madhuvahana or 'Honey Bearing', it is drawn by white horses and carries 'honey to the bee' (RV 1.112, 21 Cited by Pelikan 1992). There are also references to their whip dripping with honey. This too is written in **Atharva- Veda** where there is a hymn addressed to the Asvins honey whip.

'O Asvins, lords of Brightness, anoint me with the honey of the bee, that I speak forceful speech among men.' (Rig Veda Hymn 19 Cited by Pelikan 1992)

'He that knoweth the seven honeys of the whip, becomes rich in honey...' (Rig Veda Hymn 22 Cited by Pelikan 1992)

The whip, which is referred to repeatedly, perhaps symbolizes the discipline needed for ones Sadhana and the sweetness of pursuing ones path with single pointed focus, as one would drive a chariot, no matter what arises the yogini maintains focus and applies discipline in order to reach her goal.

In the **Satapatha Brahmana** honey is said to encompass the supreme essence of plants and through it one can absorb the essences of the Vedas.

'Honey the winds pour forth for the righteous, honey the rivers; full of honey may the plants be for us! Honey by night and morn, rich in the honey may the region of the earth be for us, honey the father Heaven! Rich in honey may the tree be for you, rich in honey the sun, full of honey kine.'
(Cited Ransome vol41, v11.5,1,4.)

The **Grihya- Sutras** and **Laws of Manu** offer rules on rituals for householders. One example is that a drink made from honey called Madhuparka was recommended to be given to guests and the following was to be recited:

'What is the honeyed, highest form of honey, and the enjoyment of food; by that honeyed highest form of honey and by that enjoyment of food, may I become the highest, honeyed, and an enjoyer of food.'
(Cited Ransome p49)

Honey is also used often in Indian and Hindu birth rites to bless and protect the child from evil. One example is a rite that involves feeding a newborn male child gold, honey and butter to ensure protection and longevity. Similarly there are also rites for marriage that also involve ingesting or putting honey on the body. It is also mentioned in the Rig Veda when priests are faced with God of Death, Yama and is also used to anoint the deceased body.

In the **Artharva- Veda** various references are made to the use of honey in magical use and healing, often combined with medicinal plants.

In Ayurvedic medicine raw, unheated honey is regarded as rejuvenating medicine. Ayurveda medicine is the natural healing system of India, meaning wisdom (Veda) of life and longevity (ayur) this system was given thousands of years ago to the Vedic seers or Rishis. Frawley (2004,p 95) describes honey as being an example of 'the sweetness of light' in that it is a kind of concentrated sunlight extracted by Bees from the plants. Frawley states that 'honey is an ancient form of soma'. Svobhoda (Aghora p176) suggests that it is only the Rishis who know what true Soma is, because only they can see it. This points to the nebulous and mysterious and other worldly quality of both honey and soma (see Appendix 2).

The **Brihadaranyaka Upanishad**, believed to have been composed in the first millennium BCE, contains a chapter called the **Madhu Brahmana** and it is said to be *'the secret essence of the Vedas themselves, was called the madhu-vidya or honey doctrine.'* Scholars date this metaphorical usage of *madhu* to a time very close to the initial composition of the Vedas.

Madhu-vidya is described in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (Cited Swami Raganathananda 1997II.v.1-19) and in the **Chandogya Upanishad** (III 1-5) *Madhu-vidya* or 'Honey-knowledge' is that of the supreme Bliss of the Self, an important Vedic teaching. This knowledge is meant to be communicated by the teacher to the disciple. It is said that Indra taught *Madhu-vidya* to Rishi Dadhichi with a warning that it should not be communicated to anyone else.

In the fifth section of second chapter Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it is said that, in this world everything is mutually helpful to everything else a mutually supportive system. The chapter stresses the interconnectedness of all and honey is used to communicate this.

'Iyam prthivi sarvesam bhutanam madhu, this earth is (like) honey to all beings, Asyai prithivyai sarvani bhutani madhu, and all beings are (like) honey to this earth.'....." this (knowledge of Brahman) is (the means of becoming) all.'

(Cited Swami Raganathananda 1997, P303)

The following passages compare aspects of the universe to honey; water is like honey, air, sun, truth, all conveying interconnectedness emerging from the same source; Brahman. This universal, all-encompassing description is similar to the descriptions in the Rig Veda and Honey Doctrines. These passages and references to honey all point to our attempts to describe our experience of the spiritual.

In the **Chandogya Upanisad** there are many beautiful references to bees.

'Om. The yonder sun indeed is the honey of the gods. Of this honey, heaven is the cross beam. The sky is the honeycomb, and the water particles in the rays are the brood (eggs).

The commentary by Swami Swahananda (1956) suggests that the simile is to support meditation.

'The eastern rays of that sun are its eastern honey cells; the Rks (rituals) are the bees, the Rig Veda is the flower and those waters are the nectar. Those very Rks (the bees) pressed this Rig Veda. From it, thus pressed, issued forth as juice, fame, splendor, alertness of senses, virility, and food for eating.'

(Swami Swahananda v 2-3 chapter 3: 1)

The chapters and verses continue in their descriptions of bees, honeycomb, honey and nectar in relationship to the directional compass points. There is also further reference to nectar ingested by the Gods. (Sw Gambhirananda 1997,p344 book 5 section 2)

The Upanishads, besides delineating various spiritual experiences, also give a few hints on sadhana, and more detailed reference regarding sacrifice and ritual. Madhu Vidhya aims to realize the Universe as a creation of Bliss. Madhu Vidhya or Nectarine Wisdom' is regarded as a priceless gift from the ancient Rishis.

Traditionally, devotion to the Gurus sandals or padukas is said to remove sorrow and suffering. In the **Paduka Panchaka** (verse 6) it comments on the Sahasvara revealing the abode of Shakti and the supreme Guru or Paramashiva. Here is the source of all sound vibration where the full knowledge of the Gurus feet are found, *'Theirs is the beautiful listed of lotuses growing in a lake of nectar.'* (Siddha Yoga 1991)

The **Sri Guru Gita** is chanted daily in Siddha Yoga ashrams and reveals the dialogue between Parvati and Shiva describing the importance of the Guru Devotee relationship. Making offerings is an important part of traditional Indian culture and Hinduism and this is conveyed in verse 51, flowers humming with bees are made as an offering to the Guru.

'O noble one, the wise always offer a handful of flowers humming with bees in the direction when Bhagavan, the sovereign Guru, is awake (residing). He is the eternal witness of the drama of the rise and the dissolution of the universe.'

Gods and Goddess



Cross culturally bees have often been represented in writings and images related to Gods and Goddess and this is also the case in Hinduism and yoga.

Gods including Vishnu and Krishna were called Madhava, the nectar born ones and their symbol was often a bee. Vishnu has been depicted as a blue bee resting on a lotus flower. Krishna is also often represented with a blue bee on his forehead and when Shiva is known in his form 'Madheri', the suave one, he is represented in the form of a triangle with a bee on top.

Kama, the Indian God of Love, similar to western Cupid notion and Greek Eros, carries a bow and arrow, the bow comprises of a chain of bees

*'Weaves a string of bees with deft invention
To speed the missile when the bow is bent.'*
(Kalidas cited Ransome 2010)

The queen bee is to her hive as a Goddess is to her devotees. The queen bee, who all others serve during their brief life is symbolic of the Goddess.

The **Devi Bhagavata Purana** or **Devi Bhagavatam** is considered a major text in parts of India. It is one of the most important works in Shaktism tradition that reveres the Devi or Shakti (Goddess) as the primordial creator of the universe. It celebrates the divine feminine as the origin of all existence, the creator, the preserver and the destroyer of everything, as well as the one who empowers spiritual liberation. While all major Puranas mention and revere the Goddess, this text centres on her as the primary divinity.

The tenth book and thirteenth chapter of the Devi Bhagavatam records the exploit of the goddess Bhramari in detail. **Bhramari Devi** is the Goddess of Black Bees, here we have the following story of how she slew the demon Arunasura:

Maharishi Veda Vyasa speaking in the voice of the sage Narada questions Lord Vishnu: "O Wise One! Who is that Bhramari Devi? What is Her Nature? Narayana states the mythology as thus. Arunad Anava, an asura wanted to establish a kingdom by driving out the devas. Aruna tries to compromise the chastity of the god's wives. He invaded the heavens and dislodged the devas from their abodes. Aruna and his army effortlessly moved into the cities.

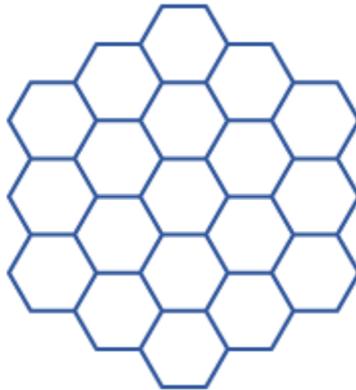
The devas rushed to Lord Shiva who summoned his fellow demons and their wives. The wives were brought before Lord Shiva. Out of fear they prayed to Goddess Parameshwari Devi for help. Pameshwari Devi transformed herself into a large bee from which a swarm of bees emanated. These bees surrounded the wives and sent out further lines of black bees which joined those emerging from her hands to cover the whole earth. The sky was overcast with this swarm and the world was cast into darkness.

Nature was filled with bees and was a spectacle of a terrific sight. The demons were torn apart by the bees and the asuras were rendered helpless and incommunicado. They could not use their weapons. Adi Shakti appeared as the divine bee and said "O, asura! Meet your end!" And she stung him to death. Even, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara wondered "Whose Maya is this! What a wonder that She will do like this?" The devis thanked Parmeshwari Devi for saving their chastity and sang victory to the Devi'. The various musical instruments, mridangas, murajas and sankhas, bells all sounded in the three worlds and sung Her glory. Devi became glad and gave separate boon when they went to her lotus feet.

It is said that this is how Devi got the name of 'Bhramari Devi' as the protector. Brahmani is worshipped on the eighth night of the Navarathri festival. The Bhramari Devi Temple or Kote-ke-mai Temple, near Kausani, is attributed to the Goddess of Bees. The Goddess Bhramari is also said to be an expression of Goddess Durga.

Generally in ancient India women had no autonomy and her role was to serve husband and family. This extended to religious and spiritual practice, including that they were not permitted to take part in ceremonies. However, there are a few small groups of Tantric Vaisnavas who worshipped women as embodiments of the Goddess Lakshmi. (Fries 2010, p99) Similarly in Saivism Tantra women are perceived as sacred as they embody the Goddess. In some sects it is proposed that Shakti is the highest principle and even Brahman is an expression of Shakti. Historically in India women were depicted in an idealized way and spiritually dominant women are rarely written about. There are however several Yogini cults that have been referred to by scholars.

Sacred Geometry



In Yoga two triangles overlaid together form a six pointed star representing the union between Shiva, the masculine and Shakti, the feminine. When the Kundalini has ascended from Mooladhara chakra via the Sushumna nadi to the crown of the head or Sahasrara these two energies are united. Interestingly, when the lines of the star are joined the shape of a hexagonal is formed and the insides of the star also form a hexagonal shape. The hexagonal and number six represents communication, balance and union.

The hexagonal is regarded as the strongest and most efficient geometrical shape. This is the shape that the honey bee chose to make their wax cells in known as honey comb, both for strength and heat modulation and insulation. It is also interesting that when magnified the bee's eyes is made up of hundreds of hexagons, as if this shape is imprinted on their very being.

Chakras

Scholars and teachers have used bees to attempt to describe the subtle and gross qualities of spiritual experience and articulate our transcendental and ecstatic states that reach beyond our everyday experience. The Bees seem to reside in a space between the material and spiritual realities serving us by offering us a way to communicate what can seem to be beyond reach with language.

In The Sacred Power by Swami Kripananda, kundalini is described as;

'...her sweet murmur is like the indistinct hum of swarms of love- mad Bees.'

(Cited from The Sat Chakra Nirupana 2014,p90)

When describing Anahata chakras

"I worship in the anahata chakras that unique pair of swans who are Ham and Sah, swimming in the minds of great beings, who subsist entirely on the honey of the full- blown lotus of knowledge."

(Shankaracharya in Ananda Labari 38 cited by kripananda, 1995 p98)

The Ajna chakra is described by Gurumayi Chidvilanasananda (head of Siddha Yoga lineage), she says that the energy is very concentrated;

"Whenever it is very concentrated in this space between the eyebrows (when meditating), there is a buzzing sound. It is as if somebody was drilling a hole there or millions of Bees were swarming in the space."

(Kripananda 1995, p56)

There are also lesser known or secret chakras namely Golata, Lalata and Lalana located in the back of the throat above the palette above where the Agya chakra is seated. These are the energy centers that are awakened in the practice of khechari mudra which is described below.

Bhramari Devi is also connected to the teachings of chakras. These seven realms of consciousness are said to emanate from the first sound, the pulse of the cosmic drum, the heartbeat of the goddess. The Maha Devi or Great Goddess, Kundalini, manifests in sound form as a queen bee; the Bhramari Devi surrounded by a cloud of buzzing bees. This lightening like goddess awakens in a buzz of ascending consciousness and descending spiritual grace. As this buzzing energy rises up the spine it illuminates the chakras which are awakened.

Kundalini

The snake or serpent is a well-known yogic symbol for Kundalini, the snake lies coiled dormant at the base of the spine and once awakened the aspirant can progress in her Sadhana. Like the snake the bee is represented as a powerful spiritual ally in many cultures. They both inhabit dark spaces and have poison or venom. This poison perhaps represents the ego and identification with the individual limitations and mundane material world. Through spiritual practices this is transformed, the ego becoming purified and eventually transformed.

Swami Muktananda from the Siddha Yoga lineage said;

'Faith in God turns poison into nectar.'

(Swami Muktananda 1996, p69)

The serpent's venom can be interpreted as the fire of yoga. The spiritual path is not always pleasant as one is faced with levels of renunciation both on an internal and at times an external basis. With the process of change and transformation the seeker will experience challenge and discomfort as a snake sheds its skin. Like the snake the bee has its sting and venom, yet it is well known for its sweetness, which is a beautiful symbol for Sadhana.

Ida and Pingala

The Sanskrit alphabet letters are used as a scale to awaken and balance the chakras. Similarly in The Path of Pollen, a vocal scale is used to balance and activate the interior stars or Chakras visualizing the golden thread (Sushuma) of two bees (Ida and Pingala) taking flight from 'The Secret' (Mooladhara chakra) to 'The Door' (Sahasrara) and beyond, an ecstatic flight.

The notion of duality are central in yoga and this is symbolized by that of masculine or feminine or Shiva and Shakti. This duality of experience, or two forces, can also be understood in terms of the honey and the sting. We are conditioned to perceive different experiences or thoughts as 'good' or 'bad' applying a judgment or preference to things. The practices support us in becoming less identified with these

notions and more able to relate to a space in between, the knot at the center of the Lemniscate (see Meditation section below).

Practices

The practices in yoga are on one level are to support us in managing our lives and on another level they are to awaken us so that we can realize our true Self. The practices support us in re-remembering that our inherent nature is divine.

As we will see there are many references to honey, bees and nectars both in a symbolic descriptive way but also in practical use. Often it is unclear why these are being referred to, for example why is honey used in the Sahajoli mudra? Honey is well known for its beneficial health properties which may account for some use but I think that this substance, this elixir is also used based on its energetic qualities of restoration, vitality and transformation, all elements that are central to ancient yogic teachings.

Meditation

The practice of meditation is to create a greater sense of stillness and spaciousness so that the individual can experience the Self and reconnect to the truth that they are indeed Consciousness. Meditation can include various techniques including watching the mind and single pointed focus to bring greater understanding of the nature of the mind.

Central to the yogic teachings is that all we are searching for is inside so by meditating we train ourselves to turn inwards, away from the senses to experience our inherent greatness.

The Siddha Yoga Guru Swami Muktananda (1996) teaches:

'The Heart is the hub of all sacred places, go there and roam.'

In the yogic tradition walking meditation is used to help focus the mind and can be a particularly useful practice when undergoing a long period of Mantra Japa. Walking meditation is also central within the European shamanic tradition The Path of Pollen. The initiates walk the '**Lemniscate Voltus**' or Dance of Infinite Flight. The Lemniscate or commonly referred to as the infinity symbol. It is also the 'waggle dance' which is one of the ways bees communicate to each other where pollen or nectar can be found, doing so in relationship to sun. In the Path of Pollen the Lemniscate is used as a living glyph to walk between realities and step outside and beyond the circles of time. It can be used to connect with the lineage and ask for information or healing and to integrate and assimilate teachings and experiences.

The infinity symbol or lemniscate is both sacred and profound, a figure of eight on its side. The loops or orbs represent the individual and the universe. The knot at the middle is where the union or state of non-duality can be touched and rested in. It can be used as a meditation symbol.

Swami Muktananda says when describing meditation that one becomes what one focuses on. In the **Aparokshanubhuti** it is said:

'One becomes exactly what one's mind dwells on intensely and with firm resolve. This can be understood through the analogy of an insect turning into a bee.' P70 – (v140)

This unusual analogy is described in that the bee encloses the insect in a mud house; the insect has complete focus on the bee and eventually becomes one.

Mantra

The mantra AUM or OM is first mentioned in the first verse of the **Yajur Veda** as pranava or 'the humming sound' (Nichalananda 2006, p193).

Both OM (AUM) and HUM are regarded as the primordial sound and can be used in various practices, For example, One may send a 'Aum' or 'Hum' to the chakras or interior stars which in turn can bring balance and health to corresponding organs.

Nada or psychic sound is considered to be the fourth of five keys to unlock subtle perception and experience Prana or life force. Nada is when sounds arise spontaneously from within. These sounds can include musical instruments, natural sounds such as thunder and the buzzing of bees. (Niranjananda Saraswati 2009, p62)

In the Hatha Yoga Pradipika it instructs:

' Breathe in quickly, making a reverberating sound like the black male Bee, and exhale slowly while softly making the sound of the female black Bee. By this yogic practice, one becomes lord of yogis and ones mind is absorbed in bliss.' (Sw Niranjananda Saraswati 2009, 2:68 p338)

In the Devi Bhagavatam (10, 13) the seed **Bija Hrim**, a popular mantra, is said to be droned by a myriad of black bees that adorn the costume of the Devi. (J Fries 2010, p254)

The use of the sound OM or HUM can bring about a sense of stillness and spaciousness and can lead beautifully into meditation practice.

Khechari Mudra

The **Hatha Yoga Pradipika** is an important classical work by 16th century teacher Svamimarama. It is divided into four sections offering practical methods to reach ones potential. In the third section the khechari mudra is explained. This mudra involves curling the tip of the tongue and it resting on the palette of the upper mouth which stimulates certain energy centers and glands, culminating in the secretion of a fluid that has been described as **Amrita** or the Nectar of Immortality (Appendix 3)

In his commentary, Risked (2004) explores the notion of the nectar in relationship to this practice, that it is the kapha current of the life force called soma or nectar. He states that it is a secretion of mystery, beyond biological understanding, whereby;

'...a physical process is transmuted into a spiritual one.'
(Risked 2004 p115)

Interestingly, there is also the same practice in The Path of Pollen used to stimulate this mystical secretion.

Svoboda (1999) refers to this as the 'Two headed snake and seal of the tenth door' accessed by the tongue turning inwards and upwards to press on and enter duct within the cranial cavity above the soft palette.

By applying pressure of the tongue on 'Ama Kala', the receptacle of nectar which is referred to as lunar nectar or amrita, it flows downwards to permeate the body. This nectar is said to free one from aging, disease and bless the individual with the eight great Siddhis. It is the Philosophers Stone.'
(Svoboda 1999, p71)

In early Tantra Khechari means 'she who moves in the void' (Fries 2010, p 137) which conjures up the image of the Queen bee flying in the infinite lemniscate.

Vajroli mudra

In the advanced practice of **Vajroli mudra** (Thunderbolt attitude) traditionally honey, as well as milk and mercury are drawn up the male urethra. This practice is said to benefit the uro- genital system and psycho sexual processes. It brings attainment of greater vitality and mental powers. I have not found literature that describes the reason that honey is used but I would propose that as with other practices and applications it is its life giving and health restorative essences that are being harnessed. Interestingly, this mudra is also associated with **Sahajoli mudra** (attitude of spontaneous arousing) or 'to fly up' which reminds us of the ascension up the energetic spinal pathway. *Vajra* refers to the nadi which is the second inner most layer of the sushumna nadi (Swami Svatmarma 1972, p370). In the Path of Pollen one of the practices is to visualize a swarm of bees ascending up the central pathway or Sushumna, the practices in both yoga and the Path of Pollen focuses on moving energy upwards.

Bhramari Pranayama

Bhramari Pranayama is described in the **Hatha Yoga Pradipika** (1972, v 68 chap 2, p260) and in other texts (Appendix 4)

The word 'Bhramar' means bee. Vibrations of humming sounds influence different parts of the brain; eliminating anxiety, relieving mental tension and promoting calm. It stimulates the pituitary, hypothalamus and pineal glands. During this pranayama practice a low pitched humming sound is made that awakens the inner psychic sounds as used in Nada Yoga (see previous mantra section).

When one sits beside a bee hive one can experience a deep sense of calm, the noise of the bees is calming and soothing on the nervous system. As with Brahmari listening to the hum of the bees helps direct ones awareness inwards.

The Body as an Alchemical Vessel

The body can be perceived as a vehicle that carries the Self whilst in this human embodiment. The yogi aims to perceive the whole universe within her body, therefore she does not identify with her body in a limited way but as a vehicle to reach beyond limited consciousness.

In Tantra the body is identified with the entire cosmos or macrocosm, the practices bring changes and transformation to the physical and energetic body and to the yogi's external reality. In the **Siddha Siddhanta Paddhali** (Guakanatha) it is said that all body parts are identified with all worlds, including the seven oceans in urine (Salt Ocean) spittle (Milk Ocean) and brain (Ocean of Honey). The inside of the

body houses 27 constellations and various planets, similar systems of thought can be found in the **Nathas, Siddhas** and **Kaula** sects of Tantra.

Substances naturally produced which are commonly treated as waste and perceived as 'dirty' such as urine, sweat and blood can be utilized as sacred substances and used for healing and rejuvenating properties in certain yogic traditions. There are many energetic veins or nadi's in the body. In yoga, Ida and Pingala are the two prominent veins, with a third in between, the Sushumna. Interestingly, this creates the familiar image used as the modern medicine symbol of the Caduceus. In yoga these energetic pathways are activated and balance to create a greater wellbeing and understanding of our true nature.

Alchemy can refer to the ingestion of drugs, plants, mineral or body substances (including ingesting sexual fluids) or inner alchemy. In Indian alchemy, **Tantric Rasayana** or science of fluids focuses on the secretions of the body. These are often regarded as taboo and repugnant in Indian and Hindu tradition. The **Kaulajnana nirnaya** (cited Fries 2010, p177) includes guidelines regarding ingesting and use of such fluids in ritual. The secretions need sacred charge to be fully imbued with power; the alchemical process is at its height when used within a spiritual context.

Bees use their bodies as alchemical vessels to make and refine substances. This includes the making of honey, Royal Jelly, Propolis and wax. On occasion the bees will collect a specific combination of nectars from specific plants. This can be for a specific ceremony for use with an individual initiate or for broader use.

One example of the bee's transmutation of matter and use of body as alchemical vessel is the production of wax to build honeycomb. The bees collect pollen and nectar from plants and then make this into honey; they eat the honey and then transform this into wax via wax producing glands in the abdomen. The bees then chew this substance and mix it with saliva to produce the wax at the right consistency for honey comb to make cells for brood and store honey for winter months.

This use of body secretions is similar to other inner alchemy traditions found cross culturally, including the Path of Pollen, whereby the Melissae's body secretions are used within a sacred context to bring healing and transformation. In the Path of Pollen the interior stars or chakras relate to different glands, when stimulated with prana (breathe) nectars are produced as vapour and excreted as liquid. As in Yoga the themes of transformation, becoming one's more authentic 'gold' Self are central.

Perhaps the most commonly used fluid in esoteric practice is urine. The practice of **Ameroli** or Ingesting of one's own urine is considered to be vitalizing and have health giving benefits in the yogic tradition and other esoteric schools. This golden nectar can also be regarded as a carrier of information about the body's wellbeing so the physical system can rebalance. This nectar is particularly potent when ingested following the stimulation of chakras, it is an informer, the 'flowering fountain' (Path of Pollen) that boosts immunity, longevity and awakening.

There is an entire text called the **Shivambu Kalpa Vidhi** on Urine Therapy from the **Damar Tantra**. Known as the 'Water of Shiva' or the 'Water of Auspiciousness'. In this text several verses advise mixing herbs with urine and honey for healing. In verse 9 it describes urine as nectar:

'Shivambu is divine nectar. It is capable of abolishing old age and various different types of ailments. The follower should first ingest his urine and then start his meditation.' (Kroan 1996, p98)

'He who drinks the mixture of Shivambo and honey is relieved of any type of ailment within a period of 6 months. His brain power becomes brilliant and his voice melodious.' (Verse 40 cited Kroan 1996, p99)

Sangha

The spiritual community or sangha works like that of the bee colony in that the collective energy is the focus which supports the individual's journey. On the whole individual needs and desires are seen as secondary to the whole. This is particularly true in an ashram, a community dedicated to spiritual advancement and focus. In 'The Search for the Self' one of Baba Muktananda's devotees compared the Siddha Yoga ashram in Oakland to a beehive:

"The beehive is a perfect model for this ashram. Every Bee works with no thought of itself, and it will instantly sacrifice itself for the good of the whole. There is never a conflict in the hive, and each Bee knows exactly what to do and how to do it, and, of course, the products of the hive are sweetness and light."

(Swami Prajnananda 1996, p48)

The beehive works as whole, there is no separation between individuals, no limited sense of 'I', the individuals work in unison. The colony lives together not as single organism but as one entity. This corresponds with the yogic philosophy of non-duality, non-other and ultimate union.

Both the bees and the spiritual aspirant work to serve, this practice is Seva or **Karma Yoga** 'selfless service' (Appendix 5). Of course there may be self-orientated motives along the way but the intention is to shift ones consciousness and awareness to being of service to others or the greater community. One example of this is in the autumn the drones or male bees will leave the hive and not be allowed by the worker bees to return as they have served their purpose, to mate with the Queen and give company to the colony during the summer months but there is an understanding that the honey stores are needed for the Queen and worker bees over the winter so the drones remain outside the hive until they die.

Sun worship

It is a joyful sight to watch bees basking in the sunlight, going about their business during the sunniest and warmest part of the day. Bees communicate and orientate to the sun's movements. The honey bees' close connection to the sun defines them as beings which are uplifting and light filled by nature. In most ancient mystical traditions acknowledgment to the Sun for its life giving and sustaining gifts of warmth and light have been central. This celebration of the sun can be seen in many cultures including Ancient Egypt, Greece and India.

In the Yogic scriptures, particularly in the Rig Veda, there are many references to sun worship and honoring the sun. The sun is a symbol of the masculine or Pingala nadi that offers us strength and purpose. In Hatha Yoga this is embodied in the practice of Surya Namaskara or Sun Salutation. This pose has an energizing effect on the physical and energetic system. In the second posture; Urdhva Hasta Uthanasana (raised arms pose) the mantra is '*Om hrim ravaye namah*' or Salutations to Ravi, whose radiance hums. Ravi is also known as Lord Surya or Deity of the Sun. Here the radiance is said to 'hum like a bee' to describe the shining brilliance.

The moon or Lunar influence was also celebrated in the ancient mystery schools in relation to motherhood, creativity and earth's fertility and its corresponding practice is Chandra Namaskara. The moon links to the feminine and the Ida nadi and is interestingly less well known and practiced which is arguably in relation to the current patriarchal based society. Both Surya and Chandra Namaskara were traditionally practiced by chanting a specific Bija or mantra with each pose relating to specific chakras.

In Yoga there is also a Sun Mudra, one variation is where the hands are outstretched and tips of thumbs touching (Appendix 6)

The **Gayatri mantra** (Appendix 7) first appears in the Rig Veda and is the oldest and arguably the principle mantra. It is a salutation to the sun and light representing the awakening and rising consciousness within us. It is said that the honey bee worships the sun. In The Path of Pollen tradition a salutation in chant form is sung to the sun at midday to honor it as the star that is life giver and sustainer. The tradition also has a hand gesture or mudra which includes ingesting the light and energy of the sun.

The **Shri Surya Pratah Smarana Stotram** is a hymn to the sun or Lord Surya; it is acknowledging new beginnings and auspiciousness.

Conclusion

This project has explored the links between the honey bee, yoga and Tantra tradition and practices. From researching yogic and tantric texts it is clear that the bee has been a source of inspiration and a worthy symbol to communicate the sweetness of the spiritual path but also an other-worldliness quality.

In this project I have illustrated how the bee is frequently used in the scriptures as a symbol of health, bliss and immortality. Often its use is unclear as to whether it refers to a physical substance or as a symbol pointing to something beyond. I suggest that both are true and valued in the yogic tradition and the references capture both the known and material and the more ethereal expressions of energy.

The hive gives a physical representation of individuals working collectively, beyond the limitation of the individual ego, perhaps showing us a model for us humans to aspire to. The bee also reminds us of our physical bodies, not as a hindrance on our spiritual path that need to be subdued by austerities, but instead as having an amazing capacity as an alchemical vessel to transmute and transform both the physical and energetic.

The honey bee helps us describe the indescribable with beauty and inspiration, offering us a symbol of collective community and alchemically created substances that have health giving benefits.

The bee is our ally that represents flight between the material, ordinary reality and the extra-ordinary of the sacred that as seekers we long to inhabit. If blessed we get to touch and rest in this space if only for a short time. Shamanic traditions such as the Path of Pollen offer us a way in to knowing and tasting this experience as do yogic and tantric paths.

Appendix

Appendix 1

The Path of Pollen

The Path of Pollen is a vibrant and vital gynocentric shamanic tradition that works with the honeybee and the hive as its central motif and living glyph. The initiates are called Melissae which links to the Temple Priestesses in ancient Greece.

Appendix 2

Soma

Soma has created much discussion amongst scholars. There continues to be uncertainty as to the plant that it comes from and if it still exists in the modern world. Some have suggested it is like Hemp, a type of Grass. It has also been suggested that it is honey. It has also been linked to the psychoactive fungi Fly Agaric which has been well documented as used by Siberian Shamans. Soma is mysterious substance that is largely unknown and not understood. It is often metaphorically referred to as *Madhu* in the Vedas.

It has also been suggested that Soma could be the Indian equivalent to the European mead. Perhaps Soma tasted like honey or was made from it. Soma, like honey, has been referred to as 'Elixir of life' and equated with alchemy as 'liquid gold'. There are also references to Soma being mixed with milk and honey.

Frawley (2004, p90) explores Soma as a sacred plant the drink of the gods. In Ayurveda medicine some soma yielding plants that can help rejuvenate body and mind. Soma as inner symbol also, the immortality and bliss is from the necratan fruit from our Yoga practices.

"...this yogic plant alchemy consists of distilling the essence of our experience, like the honey taken from flowers, to realize the bliss behind creation and at the very root of our own life- energy."

In the Rig Veda it written about extensively and is referred to as 'the drink for the Gods' and there seemed to be strict observances related to who could prepare the drink and have knowledge of how to prepare it. In other scriptures there are equally specific details about the ceremonial use of. There was also a cult called Soma Siddharta or the Doctrine of Soma.

Soma juice also mentioned in the **Chandogya Upanishad** several times. There are 387 three types of Soma sacrifices mentioned in commentary and describes Soma juice as being pressed from the Soma creeper.

The Kapalikas, a tantric lineage, identified soma as the union between Siva and Uma (Parvati).

'As, dear boy, the Bees make honey by collecting juices from different trees and reduce them into one essence, and there, as these juices have no discrimination as " I am the juice of this tree, I am the juice of that tree"; even so dear boy, all these creatures having merged into Being, do not know " we have merged into Being."

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Appendix 3

Khechari Mudra (Tongue lock)

Sitting in meditation posture, fold tongue upwards and back so that lower surface lies in contact with upper palette. Stretch tip of tongue back to comfortable position, do not strain. Apply Ujjayi pranayama, breathing slowly and deeply. Hold for a short period releasing when uncomfortable. Release if any bitter secretion.

Appendix 4

Bhramari Pranayama (Humming bee breath)

Sitting in comfortable posture, the arms raised sideways and hands to ears. The index finger used to plug the ears. Bring awareness to center of head, to Ajna chakra. Exhale evenly allowing a humming sound to pass through gently closed mouth. Experience the soft sound reverberating through skull.

Appendix 5

Selfless service

Bhagavad Gita- Chapter 5

Those who follow the path of service, who have completely purified themselves and conquered their senses and self-will, see the Self in all creatures and are untouched by any action they perform. (Verse 7)

Those whose consciousness is unified abandon all attachment to the results of action and attain supreme peace. But those whose desires are fragmented, who selfishly attached to the result of their work, are bound in everything they do. (Verse 12)

Appendix 6

Sun Mudra

In yoga there are different Surya mudras described depending on the source. One version; used for weight reduction and depression. Palm forward, index, middle and little fingers extend straight upwards, the ring fingers extend straight upwards, the ring finger is folded into the palm its tip resting on pad of the thumb, the thumb crosses this finger at second phalanges.

In the Path of Pollen there is also a sun mudra practiced. The hands are outstretched towards the sun and the tips of index and thumbs touching to form a diamond shape framing the sun at sunrise. The hand gesture and power of the sun is brought towards the Ajna chakra. The hand gesture is then turned upside down and the sun essence is then brought downwards, descending along the energetic pathway at the front of the body to be brought to womb space.

Appendix 7

Gayatri Mantra

Om bhur bhuvaha swaha
Tatsavitur varenyam
Bhargo devasya dhimahi
Dhiyo yonaha prachodayat

Om. Let us meditate upon the Light
Of that adorable sun (underlying intelligence).
May it awaken our spiritual perception and understanding
On all planes physical, vital, mental and beyond.

Appendix 8

Poetry

Your Sweet devotion

My Rumi- reciting friend
You are becoming the object
Of your Sweet devotion.
You drip with the same honey
that sweetened
Rumi- and Hafiz's poems.

My friend
you are the honey
Inside this honeycomb existence.
From your bright nothingness
comes the taste of God.

Yes, I know you have your
Moments of doubt.
But each one brings you closer
to the doubtless.
So throw caution to the wind and dare to love
even the bee's sting.

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