

**Yoga: Sport or Spirituality?**  
**A comparison of practitioners' views and practices at SATS, Norway**  
**with yoga literature**

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**Master's Thesis**

**Master in Global Studies**

**Word count: (30500)**

**10 December 2019**

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## Glossary

Amla: Indian gooseberry with sour taste.

Arjuna: Central character of the epic Mahabharata.

Asana: Seat; posture.

Aṣṭāṅgayoga: Yoga of eight auxiliaries, most commonly associated with Patañjali's Yogaśāstra.

Atman: The self.

Āyurveda: An Indian system of medicine.

Brahmā: One of the three chief gods of Hinduism, together with Śiva and Viṣṇu.

Brahman: The absolute, the supreme principle of Vedānta (in Sanskrit, brahman); a member of Hinduism's priestly caste (in Sanskrit, brāhmaṇa).

Cakra: 'Wheel'; a focus for visualization in the yogic body.

Citta: The mind, the activity of which is to be suppressed in Patañjali's and other yoga traditions.

Dharma: Law, justice, religious observance, societal or caste duty.

Dhyāna: 'Meditation'.

Doṣa: One of three bodily substances (kapha, pitta and vāta), which, according to Āyurveda, need to be kept in balance in order to maintain health.

Guṇa: In the Sāṃkhya system, one of the three qualities that are present in varying proportions in all things (see rajas, tamas and sattva); guṇa may also refer to a supernatural power resulting from success in yoga.

Haṭhayoga: 'Yoga by force'; a system of yoga that rose to prominence in the second millennium CE.

Idā: A subtle channel (nāḍī), usually located on the left side of the Suṣumnā.

Ívara: 'The lord/ Lord'; God.

Japa: The repetition of mantras.

Jñāna : Knowledge.

Kapha: One of the three doṣas, akin to phlegm.

Krishna: Deity. One of the avatars of Vishnu in Hinduism.

Kumbhaka: Breath-retention; in haṭhayoga, specific methods of inhalation and/ or exhalation used in conjunction with breath-retention.

Kuṇḍalinī: ‘She who is coiled’. The power of the divine feminine, residing within the body of the yogi.

Mokṣa: Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

Mung: Moong bean, green gram, maash.

Mudrā: ‘Seal’; a gesture used in tantric ritual; a technique for manipulating the vital energies in haṭhayoga.

Nāḍī: A subtle channel in the body which carries vital energy.

Nirvāṇa: ‘Extinction’. Liberation from death and rebirth, especially in Buddhism. See also mokṣa, kaivalya.

Pātañjala yoga: Yoga as described in Patañjali’s Yogaśāstra (the Pātañjalayogaśāstra) and its commentaries.

Piṅgalā: A channel (nāḍī), usually located on the right side of the Suṣumnā.

Pitta: One of the three doṣas, akin to bile.

Prakṛti: The principle of matter in the Sāṃkhya philosophical system.

Prāṇa: Breath, the vital energy that animates all living things; or one of five principal breaths.

Prāṇāyāma: Breath-control.

Pratyāhāra: Withdrawal of the senses (often included among the auxiliaries of yoga).

Puraka: Inhalation.

Puruṣa: ‘Person’. The principle of spirit in the Sāṃkhya philosophical system.

Rajas: One of the guṇas, characterized by passion and activity; alternatively, female menstrual or generative fluid (which in some yogic systems is also said to exist within men).

Ramanuja: Indian philosopher.

Recaka: Exhalation.

Sādhana: (Spiritual) practice.

Śaiva: ‘Pertaining to Śiva’; a devotee of the god Śiva; descriptive of traditions or texts in which Śiva is the principal deity.

Sakti: ‘Power’; the divine feminine; (Śakti) a/ the goddess, usually the consort of the god Śiva.

Samādhi: 'Absorption'. The ultimate cognitive state of yoga.

Sāṃkhya: An ancient dualist philosophical system, which became one of the orthodox Brahmanical philosophies.

Saṃsāra: The cycle of death and rebirth, 'cyclic existence'.

Sattva: One of the guṇas, characterized by light and harmony.

Shankaracharya: Indian philosopher.

Suṣumnā: The central channel (nāḍī) in the body. tamas: One of the guṇas, characterized by darkness and heaviness.

Tantra: A type of text; a body of knowledge, ritual and praxis regarded as distinct from—and more powerful than—Vedic revelation.

Tapas: 'Heat'; asceticism, in particular physical austerities.

Vāta: One of the three doṣas, akin to wind.

Yoginī: A type of tantric goddess; (yoginī) a female practitioner of yoga.

## Abstract

In YOGA SUTRAS, Patanjali defines yoga as “yogas chitta vritti nirodhah, Yoga is the restriction of the movement of the mind” (Philosophy of yoga, 2018, p. 80). It is important to understand YOGA SUTRAS starts with this sutra, and perhaps Patanjali offers the whole meaning of yoga within these three words. However, the important thing we want to concentrate on is that Patanjali words are only concentrated on the mind and have nothing at all to do with modern poses of yoga, and it is mostly the yoga of the mind and not the body (Philosophy of yoga, 2018, p. 81). Therefore we should ask where all these difficult poses in modern yoga come from? and where is the place of the mind, spirituality and traditions? Is there any connection between modern physical yoga and the ancient yoga of the mind?

In the classical texts, yoga mainly acts as a means to still the mind and support atman individual souls attaining Brahman. However, in the modern era, the word yoga has been given new interpretations. In the Encyclopedia of Religion, Mircea Eliade explains yoga in the following way, “yoga derives from the root yuj, meaning to bind together, hold fast or yoke. Yoga means union; to unite body and mind” (Encyclopedia of Religion, Eliade, entry of Yoga). What is yoga truly for Norwegians? Spirituality, sport or health? The main objective of this research is to go behind the scenes and answer this question. Langøien, in his article on YOGA, CHANGE AND EMBODIED ENLIGHTENMENT asserts that modern yoga in the west has more attention on the body and the physical part, while there are still some connections to the traditional and philosophical part of this path which may impact practitioners’ experience and in turn affects yoga traditions as well. (2012, p. 27).

Through this research, I aim to explore the links and relations between the fitness trend side of yoga and its philosophical and religious traditions among practitioners of yoga at SATS.



## **Acknowledgement**

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to write this thesis, and am thankful for the support and skilled advice of my supervisor, Associate Professor, Dr. Gerd Marie Ådna.

I deeply appreciate the participation of all the informants who agreed to be interviewed.

My sincere thanks to the teachers and staff of VID Specialized University in Stavanger for all their encouragement and support.

I would also like to thank the managers at SATS, Jill Belden Guldhav and Marielle Rønneberg Ness, for making this research project possible.

# 1 Short introduction

The common understanding of yoga today is different from the early texts belong to 2500 years ago. Most of the ancient scriptures introduce yoga as a practical discipline with its methods leading individuals to liberation. Even the most famous definition of yoga by Patanjali at the beginning of Yoga Sutras introduces yoga as a method for stilling the mind. Since early times, a variety of yogic systems and doctrines have evolved and created changes and techniques in this ancient path, and as a result we have modern yoga with more focus on the body than the mind (Philosophy of yoga, 2018 November, p. i). Still, the spiritual side of yoga is important for many practitioners and the main purpose for them is spiritual development rather than fitness. But what is the situation in Norway and more specifically at SATS? In this thesis, I want to explore the issue and represent it as my master thesis at VID Specialised University.

## I. Objective

I am an outsider in Norwegian society. I started my work as a yoga instructor at the heart of one of the largest sports centre chains. I have many years experience as a yoga instructor, but one thing was unclear for me. What were the people looking for from yoga classes? There were large numbers of participants with expensive clothes and equipment. In light of this background, I started my masters degree at VID Specialised University in Stavanger. I prepared to conduct research on the nature of yoga in SATS Norway for my thesis program. As background, SATS is a sports centre, an abbreviation of Sports Aerobic Training Centre (Center). They opened their first eight clubs in Norway in 1995 and expanded extremely rapidly where, by 2000, the number of SATS clubs in all the Nordic countries was over one hundred.

The objective of this thesis is to examine and explore the links and relations between the fitness trend side of yoga and its philosophical and religious traditions. This will be accomplished by investigating yoga among practitioners at the Norwegian gym chain SATS and contrasting with yoga as described in different texts, from Bhagavad Gita and Sutras of Patanjali to more modern

practitioners, such as Pattabhi Jois, Iyengar and Anandamurti. Additionally, I will use the ideas of Singleton, Flood and other scholars in the analysis.

To understand the early stages of yoga and how it has changed over time, I began with an exploration of the classical texts and contrasted them with the information I recorded and received through interviews, questionnaires and observations. My aim was to understand what yoga is for Norwegians, but before that I needed to know what the original yoga was and how close or far the informants of this project were from it. My main purpose was to understand the quality of experience of yoga practitioners through in-depth interviews and observations, to generate meaning and find out the goal of this particular group of people routinely engaging in yoga classes.

## **II. Research question**

What is yoga for Norwegians? Sport or spirituality? What are they looking for when they attend yoga classes at a sports centre on a regular basis?

These questions were the first steps of my research journey, which I'm going to share here as my master thesis project.

The aim of my pre-fieldwork phase was to prepare a set of questions which could solicit answers that could clarify what yoga is for Norwegians. How does yoga function in this society which is not the homeland of yoga? My aim was to create a descriptive or theoretical formulation and explanation for my research questions.

### **III. Brief Methodology**

I used qualitative and quantitative methods for this research. I interviewed eleven members of the yoga classes from different SATS centres in Rogaland, Norway. However, later on I supplemented the qualitative research methods with quantitative methods by distributing a short questionnaire consisting of six questions to test the validity of the data I collected in the interviews, and hopefully to generate more correct typologies and hypotheses. Most of the interviews were held at SATS. As I was an insider at SATS, I was also able to observe the members of the yoga classes and casual conversations were another source of data from the members of the yoga classes.

I was aware enough to be faithful to the ethical rules as a researcher and not let the environment and my own ideas reflect on my research. On the other hand, I still had to be faithful to the members of the club who trusted me and came to my classes regularly.

### **IV. Thesis Outline**

This thesis starts with a short introduction followed by the history and philosophy of yoga. The third chapter is the methodology part, including underlying assumptions, research process and ethical considerations. The next chapter covers the theoretical framework, including analysis of different ideas about spirituality and religion. The fifth chapter is my observations which followed by the research findings from the interviews and short questionnaires with descriptive and statistical illustrations to give comprehensive results, I have divided the findings in different chapters, physical health is directly coming in sixth chapter. Mental health is in seventh chapter which is followed by the chapter of spiritual health. In the ninth chapter I represent the questionnaires. Conclusion and recommendations are in the final chapter, followed by the references and appendices.

## 2 History of Yoga

### 2.1 History of yoga

Yoga is a combination of diversity of sources and religious thought from Vedic to Tantric strands. Classical yoga, or yoga darshana, has its origin in various Vedic sources, such as the Shvetashvatara Upanishad, Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. These texts are focused on controlling the mind and on the identification of true self. In contrast, Tantric yoga has more emphasis on transcendence of the body through different physical and mental practices. Therefore, one might say that contemporary yoga has a closer relationship to Tantric sources than the Vedic scriptures. As a result, we can understand yoga according to two different sources of Vedic and Tantric origin and what we are practicing as yoga today is more closer to the tantric strands than the Vedic one. (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. i-iii).

Singleton explains that what we know today as yoga in the West is nothing other than the practice of asana (2010, p. 3). Singleton adds that from the 1990s, yoga was industrialized and marketed by different names and brands transnationally and turned to a business and product, rather than a path to enlightenment – which is a new phenomena in the history of yoga (2010, p. 3-6).

A strong evidence for yoga being a globalized practice is the declaration of the International Day of Yoga by the United Nations on June 21<sup>st</sup>.

To understand the early stages of yoga and how it has changed over the course of time, we can begin with an exploration of the classical texts. There are six orthodox philosophical systems, or darshanas, that accepted the authority of the Vedic revelation. Out of these, Vedanta, Samkhya and Yoga Sutras have a close connection to yoga. The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most recognizable parts of Vedanta with a theistic and devotional nature. Samkhya literary means “analysis” of the elements, such as Prakriti and Purusha. Samkhya has a great influence on the Gita and Sutras of Patanjali. However, in the beginning, yoga had a deeper association with Samkhya. Later on, this connection became weakened under the growing influence of the Vedanta doctrine (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. i-10).

## **2.2 Samkhya and Yoga**

Shankaracharya texts also accepted the fact that there is a strong connection between Samkhya and Yoga Darshana. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is one of the most important texts of the darshana, yet Patanjali in his book does not explore the philosophy of existence as it is, but rather explains the kind of practice individuals should acquire and do, like observing the nature of the true self. While unity with Brahman is central to Vedantic philosophy, Yoga Sutras follow the Samkhya thesis to offer the notion of Kaivalya in Sutras 2.25, 3.56 and 4.33, which is the state of liberation and freedom from gunas, yet there is no idea of offering oneness with Brahman. Yoga prepares and supports the connection of individual souls to the universal soul, a science which unites human beings with God. This is the essential idea of Vedanta doctrine, unity of atman and Brahman, and the illusion of the world, which is absent in Samkhya philosophy. As Shankaracharya explains, it seems that yoga in the modern era is more connected to Vedanta; even the definition of yoga as “union” and “unity of atman and Brahman” is colored by the Vedantic doctrine, not Samkhya. Clearly Shankara had no objection to the teachings of Krishna, and most probably those of Patanjali, as a path to liberation and knowledge of the true self (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 14-22).

## **2.3 Yoga in Upanishads**

Although the Upanishads texts do not deal with the topic of yoga to any great extent, one can still find many direct and indirect references to yoga in the Katha, Shvetashvatara and Maitri Upanishads. It is not easy to give a generalized summary of the perspective of the Upanishads, but one can loosely say that they all accept the concept of Brahman with an emphasis on the individual soul as atman. Shankara explains in his commentaries that atman is bound to the transmigration by the unbreakable law of karma whereby individuals' ultimately realized knowledge will motivate them to lose their individuality to exist in Brahman (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 24).

## **The Katha Upanishad**

The Katha Upanishad consists of six chapters and 120 verses revolving around the existence of the transcended atman. It features a conversation between the God of death and a young brahmana curious to know about the fate after death and how to achieve higher knowledge to get free from the cycle of rebirth. Just like the Bhagavad Gita and the Sutras of Patanjali, the Katha Upanishad also explains that one can attain this knowledge by means of yoga. Katha does not discuss yoga practices in detail, but refers to some yoga techniques and its effects for gaining higher knowledge and attainment of spiritual identity to transcend both mind and body (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 24-30).

## **The Shvetashvatara Upanishad**

This is one of the major Upanishads, widely accepted by all scholars. It consists of six chapters and 103 verses. With a theistic content, it discusses how atman can attain liberation from the world of matter with the help of a Deity. “Matter is perishable but Hara (Shiva) is immortal and imperishable. This one Deity controls both the perishable matter and the individual soul, the atman. By engaging oneself in meditation upon him and finally uniting one’s existence with him, all this illusion (maya) ceases.” (philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p.22). The second chapter of Shvetashvatara is the major reference in the Upanishads to yoga practices, mostly relating to the attainment of spiritual knowledge, controlling the mind and the achievement of liberation. It explains how yoga practice brings relief from suffering and release from the cycle of death and rebirth. This is the only reason given for practicing yoga and this reveals how yoga practice was inseparably linked to the primary concepts of Indian religion (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 24-40).

## **2.4 The Mahabharata**

This is an ancient epic, around 6000 pages or 12 volumes, written in Sanskrit. It narrates the conflict within the Karu dynasty between Pandavas and Kauravas. According to Hindu orthodoxy, it dates back to 3000 BC; however scholars believe it is a composite work repeatedly added to during the period 400 BC to AD 400, with an avatar of supreme Deity Vishnu called Krishna, with religious teachings on the consideration of duty. There is one English translation of Mahabharata available, by Mohan Kisari Ganguli (1896) consisting of twelve volumes. Warriors in Mahabharata undertake rough practices to develop supernatural powers and this is where the Mahabharata discusses yoga. Together with the Bhagavad Gita, the Shanti Parvan (the book of peace) in the Mahabharata gives considerable attention to yoga instructions. From the Upanishads to modern times it is notable that Indian thought and spirituality has been hugely concerned with the question of rebirth; a focussed attention on yoga as a means of liberating the soul from its connection to the world of matter. At that time, mind was the main focus of the yoga practices, and asanas were just a facilitator for controlling the power of will and mind (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 24-54).

## **2.5 Bhagavad Gita**

The Gita is a short text of 18 chapters and 700 verses belonging to the Mahabharata. The book is a conversation between Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, and Arjuna a great warrior of the time, before the commencement of battle. The Gita is one of the three main texts of Vedanta with a sound tendency to Samkhya philosophy. It frequently refers to the yogic ideas which are aligned with the Yoga Sutras. Still, there are arguments to be aware of. The Yoga Krishna explains about is Karma-yoga and it is different from the yoga of Patanjali. Bravery, dharma, divinity, moksha and liberation from rebirth are the main ideas within the context of the Mahabharata, mostly in a form of dialogue, as in the Gita. Giving a clear date for Sanskrit texts like the Gita is not an easy task, but some scholars suggest a period stretching from 300 BC to 250 AD. However, there is much discussion around whether the Gita is pre-Buddhism or post-Buddhism, because it offers a



particular perspective of renunciation of the world which might be in accordance with the Buddhist point of view. The great scholars of Hinduism, such as Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, have made extensive commentaries on the Gita, highlighting its importance among other Sanskrit texts. The emphasis of the teachings changes during the course of the Gita, from karma yoga to more Upanishadic ideas like jnana-yoga, acquisition of realized knowledge and desireless actions. Krishna as a Deity introduces the nature of God and devotion to God as a sustaining presence to restore the status of dharma, not from a transcended domain but from earth (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 55-60).

### **2.5.1 Yoga in Bhagavad Gita**

It is not wrong if one argues that the entire text of the Gita is related to yoga in a general sense of the term. Gita refers to yoga in a variety of different religious practices in unusual and complex ways, offering four different types of yoga: karma-yoga, bhakti-yoga, jnana-yoga and dhyana-yoga. There are places where the Gita directly refers to classical yoga and Bhakti (Philosophy of yoga, p.55-60).

### **Chapter 4 of Gita, verses 25-30**

We can summarize verses 26 and 27 as discussing the withdrawal of the senses while 29 and 30 refer to breathing exercises. These verses indicate that pranayama was an acknowledged part of these practices at the time of the Gita. As Shankaracharya and Ramanuja described, verse 29 is an explanation of Puraka, Rechaka and Kumbhaka, three identical parts of pranayama - inhalation, exhalation and holding the breath. This is an indication of the classical period; complex forms of breathing techniques were used yet the exact details are not clear (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 61-62).

## **Chapter 5 of Gita, verses 26-29**

These verses start with the realization of higher knowledge, which is the result of the identification of atman, leading individuals to conduct desireless actions to bring them unfading joy. Concentration on a point between two eyebrows indicating inward control of the mind and withdrawal of the senses as two fundamental parts of yoga practice. The path of devotion also introduced in this chapter, which is the result of knowing Krishna, as a transcended atman, is in close relation to realized knowledge (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 63-64).

## **Chapter 6 of Gita, verses 1-47**

Verses 1-9 discuss renunciation as the basis for yoga.

The primary goal of yoga is withdrawal of the senses from worldly attractions through desireless actions; in this way renunciation is an intrinsic part of this doctrine. The teaching slowly moves from karma yoga to jnana. The development of detachment and preventing passions are discussed in later verses, and ultimately lead practitioners to more concentration on the higher self. (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 64-65).

Verses 10-17, the practice of yoga.

These verses describe how an individual adopts asanas to bring the mind under control by keeping the back and neck straight in one line, which seems close to what hatha-yoga suggests. Focus of the mind on a single point on the tip of the nose or between two eyebrows and withdrawal of the senses are the aims of these practices. Shankaracharya denotes in the later part of verses 14 Krishna being the subject of perception can be advocated as Bhakti-yoga or devotion, and might be understood as fixing meditation on atman, because Krishna as the Deity exists at the core of every being to lead them to peace and liberation. (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 65-66).

Verses 18-32, the object and the goal of meditation.

Shankaracharya explains it as yoga of meditation or dhyana-yoga. He introduces it as a means to explore our inner spiritual identity and adds that after the mind comes under control and realization of the atman as the ultimate goal of yoga occurs, suffering will stop, and endless joy begins. He also explains that one should not expect it to be an easy task, yet the role of devotion to Deity is critical along the way. (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 66-67).

Verses 33-36, Arjuna's misgivings about yoga.

Krishna responds to the objections raised by Arjuna, “the mind is unsteady, Krishna, it is dominating, powerful and harsh, I think controlling the mind is harder to achieve than controlling the wind”. Krishna rejects the objection and explains that by achieving self-mastery through constant regulated practice and complete renunciation of worldly matter one can achieve control of the mind. He adds that the role of devotion and the deity who delivers aid to devotees is important (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 67-68).

Verses 37-47, the fate of yogis who falls short.

What if a seeker fails? Arjuna tells Krishna that this spiritual path is not an easy one! The answer Krishna offers is significant, “the progress they have gained is never lost, still in the next life they can achieve more perfection and continue the path”. Later verses denote the difference between scholarly knowledge and realized knowledge, which earlier may never lead to enlightenment. The next verses explain the link between yoga and devotion, and Krishna introduces himself as the atman in all beings (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 69-70).

## **Chapter 6 of Gita in relation to the Yoga Sutras**

Scholars suggest that Patanjali constructs the Sutras based upon the Gita, therefore the role of the Gita in the construction of the Sutras is important. We can comparatively use chapter six of the Gita to look at the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga offered by Patanjali in the Sutras.

Yama and Niyama, the first two limbs, consist of five Yama and five Niyama. The Gita does not

offering it exactly in the same manner, yet close similarities are observable, such as the vow of celibacy in verse 14 of chapter 6 in Gita. The other six limbs are as follows:

Asana, in verses 11 to 13 refers to ideal postures; it may be used by practitioners of dhyana-yoga.

Pranayama: Krishna gives a quick explanation of breathing exercises in this chapter.

Pratyahara: verses 24 and 26 provides insight into the notion of controlling the mind and restraining the senses which can be referred to as Pratyahara.

Dharana: in verses 12 and 13, Krishna explains how to fix the attention on the peak of the nose to focus the mind and suspend the perception of other objects.

Dhyana: a trained mind which is under the control of will has a great chance for the realization of atman and the Gita places much emphasis on this notion, as we can see in verses 20 to 26.

Samadhi: the spiritual enlightenment which the Gita describes as the state of realized knowledge, endless joy and transcended world, is explained in verses 27 to 32 (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 71).

## **2.6 Yoga Sutras of Patañjali**

It is not easy to suggest the exact date when the Sutras were composed. It can be regarded as the text after the Gita and passages of the Mahabharata because it carries awareness of them; therefore we can say second or third centuries AD. The Yoga Sutra consists of four chapters as follows: Samadhi-pada, Sadhana-pada, Vibhuti-pada and Kaivalya-pada, in total 195 sutras. However, it is not a manual of yoga poses but encoded philosophical facts about the doctrine of yoga, giving a general synopsis of yoga practice yet never going into details. It seems like Patanjali is giving the chance to the later teachers to interpret the Sutras for their own students. Samadhi-pada offers the philosophy of yoga. Sadhana-yoga describes the idea of ashtanga yoga or eight limbs of yoga. Vibhuti-pada discusses more about the result of yoga practices, like supernatural powers. Kaivalya-pada introduces the notion of liberation from suffering, and that is where the Yoga Sutras approximate Indian religious thought. (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 80- 100). Patanjali aims to end suffering by ceasing the mind and stilling the process of rebirth. When comparing the Gita and the Sutras, one can recognize that Patanjali was

aware of the teachings of the Gita as he frequently used the Gita in constructing the Sutras. Patanjali was aware of asana and pranayama, but there are still many differences between the philosophy he offered and what is practiced today in Western countries. In the Sutras, the mind received the major attention and the body less, which is in contrast to what is happening today in the modern era. Around 400 AD, the rise of Tantric teachings influenced all the Indian traditions including yoga; this brought many shifts and developments into the domain. (Philosophy of yoga, p. 118-120).

## **2.7 Yoga and Tantra**

We are going to see how tantra affected yoga, and in a wider context, Indian spirituality, to transform it into what we know today as yoga. But what is tantra? In around 300 BC, Indian thought as a Vedic religion faced new non-Vedic teachings such as Buddhism and Jainism, which strongly influenced Indian spirituality. Around 300 to 600 AD, signs of new non-brahmanic ideas emerged, known as tantric teachings. Worshipping sacred images replaced fire rituals and challenged Vedic orthodoxy and doctrines. Later on, the Brahmin community slowly accepted them and marked them as orthodoxy and gradually these two sources of Vedic and tantric integrated to shape modern Hinduism. (Philosophy of yoga, 2018 p. 121- 123).

### **Tantra and the subtle body**

The other notion which was introduced by tantric teachings is the idea of subtle body, known as chakras and nadis which is absent in the classical yoga texts. Prana moves via complex centers of nadis or channels, the main ones being ida, pingala, and sushumna.

There are seven main centers placed along the main nadis:

- 1, Muladhara Chakra
- 2, Svadhisthana Chakra
- 3, Manipura Chakra
- 4, Anahata Chakra

5, Vishuddhi Chakra

6, Ajna Chakra

7, Sahasrara Chakra

Chakras are represented by lotus flowers and each has its own mantra and particular colour. At the base of the spine, the Muladhara chakra, center of kundalini energy, is sleeping as a “coiled serpent” which can be awakened by tantric practices; its rising energy may flow to the other chakras. (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 128-129).

### **Tantra and Yoga**

Sources of classical yoga like the Gita and Sutras are mainly concerned with control and transcendence of the mind to realize spiritual identity. These sources pay less attention to the body while the central concern of tantric teachings is the transformation of the body. Hata yoga also is driven from tantric teachings, in chapter 10 of the Jayakhya Samhita, Hata yoga is introduced as a totally new practice to address the body as the subject of transformation with potential positive benefits for awakening, and is a complimentary teaching added later to classical yoga. Hatha-yoga or Hata yoga, means “force” or “bodily” yoga. (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 130-147).

### **2.8 Hatha Yoga Pradipika**

The three main texts belonging to Hatha Yoga are not more than six hundred years old and its teaching is much closer to modern yoga practices. When compared to classical texts, such as the Gita or Sutras, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Shiva Samhita and Gheranda Samhita describe in a clear way how to perform asanas and practice breathing exercises for modern yoga practitioners. The oldest text of Hatha yoga is written by Svamarama with tantric attitude starting from asana, pranayama, then mudras for awakening the kundalini energy; the fourth and last chapter is

dedicated to the explanation of samadhi. “Ha” means “the sun” and “tha” means “the moon” which can be interpreted as ida and pingala nadis. Hatha Yoga Pradipika is deeply affected by tantric teachings and the text clearly offers tantric practices of yoga in the medieval age. However, Svatmarama shows a great respect in his book for Patanjali, nonetheless whatever Hatha Yoga Pradipika offers is mainly absent in Yoga Sutras. The application of yoga in Hatha Yoga Pradipika is mostly to purify the body, raise energies and transform it to the best capabilities available. Svatmarama mentioned in his book that tantric teachings transcended what we know as classical yoga; a set of new techniques to control the mind more easily. Whereas Arjuna in the Gita called it “harder than controlling the wind”, showing the dynamic nature of Indian religious thought. (Philosophy of yoga, 2018 November, p. 149-171).

## **2.9 Scandinavian gymnastics**

I would like to move closer to the modern era and especially to the physical environment where I conducted my research. Singleton explains: “modern asana practice emerged in a dialectical relationship to physical culture and harmonial gymnastics: it absorbed many of these teachings, claimed them as its own, and sold them back to the Western readership as the purest expression of Indian physical culture” (2010, p. 153-154).

He believes “these models have their roots in European Mesmerism and have, as De Michelis (2004) demonstrates, substantially influenced the shape of Modern Yoga via Vivekananda’s prana model of yoga practice” (Singleton 2010, p. 153-154). Singleton believes the nationalist nostalgia in the Scandinavian culture was a ground in modern time, especially the Swedish

gymnastics, to accept and integrate the physical aspects of Hatha yoga and even develop it to a therapeutic or medical gymnastics in order to create harmony within the individual practitioners (Singleton, 2010, p. 84).

### **2.10 Krishnamacharya at the Mysore Center**

Singleton explains that in the twentieth century, Krishnamacharya is one of the most influential figures, his teaching affected the physical form of yoga globally. Linkage of asanas and sequences get closer to more aerobic kind of movements. Pattabhi Jois, as a student of Krishnamacharya, introduced Ashtanga Yoga and Vinyasa flow which is an outcome of Krishnamacharya's teachings which are now globally practice in yoga centers across the world. BKS Iyengar is also another student of Krishnamacharya who introduced Iyengar Yoga (Singleton 2010, p. 175-176).



## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Research approach

As an outsider to Norwegian society, I work as a yoga instructor at the heart of one of the largest chains of sports centres. I know how to teach yoga but one thing was unclear for me. What were the people looking for from the yoga classes? There were large numbers of participants with expensive clothes and equipment. With this background, I started my masters degree at VID Specialized University in Stavanger. I prepared to conduct research on the nature of yoga in SATS Norway for my thesis program.

“Research always begins with some problems or set of issues, at the very least it starts from what Malinowski (1922) referred to as foreshadowed problems” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 67).

What is yoga for Norwegians? Sport or spirituality? What are they looking for when they attend yoga classes at a sports centre on a regular basis?

These questions were the first steps of my research journey, which I'm going to share here as my master thesis project.

As Gay and Airasian (2000, p. 45) explain, research is the systematic application of a family of methods that are employed by the researcher to provide trustworthy information about problems. But which method to choose? How could I dive deeper into the minds of individuals? What methods could lead me behind the scenes?

I chose a qualitative research method for this thesis. My main purpose was to understand the quality of experience of yoga practitioners through in-depth interviews and observations, to generate meaning and find out the goal of this particular group of people engaging routinely in yoga classes. However, later on I supplemented the qualitative research methods with quantitative methods by distributing a short questionnaire consisting of six questions to test the validity of the data I collected in the interviews, and hopefully to generate more correct typologies and hypotheses.

The aim of my pre-fieldwork phase was to prepare a set of questions which could direct me to the answers that could clarify the research question for me in a descriptive or theoretical formulation and explanation.

As an insider, a yoga instructor, who had recently joined the SATS club, I had already been observing this phenomenon for several months, and as a researcher I started by interviewing the members. My goal was to understand the facts and generate theory regarding the research question. What is yoga for Norwegians? How did it change from the limited postures of yogis in the Indus Valley thousands of years ago to the complicated sequence of exercises in Western countries, indeed into a thoroughly globalized phenomenon and multibillion dollar industry? Where does this modern yoga come from? Is it descended from the ancient systems of yoga, or is it a transcended form? Or maybe a totally new phenomenon carrying only the ancient name YOGA?

For example, in references from the epic Mahabharata (3000 years ago), book 12 chapter 289, Yogavidhi represents yoga as the following: “a yogi who concentrates intently in great formal observances focused on his naval, head, heart perfectly harnesses his subtle self with the self (289.39-40) having burned off his past deeds good and bad, his wisdom spotless, he may, if he wishes, take up the highest yoga harnessing and quickly get absolutely free (289.4)” (Philosophy of yoga, 2018 p. 19-20).

In the Upanishads, Katha Upanishad (2500 years ago) features a dialogue between the young ascetic Nachiketas and the Lord of Death Yama who compares yoga to “the relationship between the eternal self, intellect, mind, senses and the body” to “the relationship between a owner of a chariot, his chariot, the charioteer and the horses” (Philosophy of yoga, p. 21).

I was curious to find out the mechanisms or settings that may characterize participants’ perspectives; defining yoga as a spiritual path or alternatively just physical exercise, such as running or swimming or anything else.

Yoga is increasingly popular among adults in Western countries. Over 27 million people have participated in yoga classes in 2017 in the United States; the majority of them mention flexibility and anxiety reduction as their main goals (The Statistics Portal at Statista.com April, second, 2019).

Patanjali, at the very beginning of the Yoga Sutras, explains “yoga is the cessation of the modification of the mind” (Philosophy of yoga 2018 November, p. 80). What is the direct manifestation of a ceased mind in modern life? Practicing yoga produces good vibes and feelings as well, but I wanted to observe, go through and find out what the results were in the area which I live and study.

In the process of collecting data, I as a researcher, was the primary analyst and used an inductive approach to generate insightful understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, and this was clearly impossible to measure quantitatively. In this way, I started the work by in-depth interviews. I randomly chose eleven yoga participants from different yoga centres in Rogaland in three age groups of under 30, over 30 and over 45.

As an insider at the club and instructor in the classes, it was not difficult to observe participants and find interviewees but still I was aware enough to be faithful to the ethical rules as a researcher and not let the environment and my own ideas reflect on my research. On the other hand, I still had to be faithful to the members of the club who trusted me and came to my classes regularly.

### **3.2 Observations**

In fact, I didn't need to go through any process of negotiation to enter this research domain to observe the members of the yoga classes and interview them. My physical presence was not problematic or inappropriate. I was already a part of the group; members of the group knew that I was a student in Norway working on my research thesis about yoga. Indeed my research was not covert, but I was a participant in the field and it was relevant to my goal.

I did not need a gatekeeper to acquire my role in this research field, as I was a participant observer and already part of the group. But indeed I was still confronting an alien culture. I was familiar with yoga, but not in a Western country, clearly not in Norway and at SATS.

Throughout the research, I observed the mood of participants during, after and before classes; how comfortable or irritated they were in a sitting meditation posture; could people sit calmly for

one minute without moving? Could they trust themselves or their environment and close their eyes in the Savasana? Did their food habits have any impact on all these responses and reactions? I believe my personal characteristics were fitting for this research. I have been teaching yoga and meditation for more than 15 years, and am therefore well-equipped to overcome any physical and emotional barriers and limitations that may appear along the way.

### **3.3 Sample of questions**

“Finding the right question to ask is more important, and sometimes more difficult, than answering it” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 78).

Preparing questions was not an easy task. I believed the best way to construct an effective interview was to have in-depth knowledge of the philosophy of yoga and upon that base questions relevant to the modern lifestyle of Norwegian society. Eight limbs of yoga greatly assisted me to prepare my questions, and even adjust my observations and focus more on the things which did not seem to be important at first.

Yama and Niyama are the first two principles which introduce the moral codes for yogis, including the do's and don'ts leading to lifestyle preferences of yogis. I created some of the interview questions based upon these norms. The third principle is Asana, physical exercises which may create balance in the body. The fourth principle is pranayama, the breathing exercises which improve our concentration, which is helpful in the observation process. One could, for example, sit still with closed eyes in the lotus pose and concentrate on breathing. Generally this exercise does not take more than three minutes, and I instruct people to sit relaxed in any pose they like, keep their back straight, close their eyes and concentrate on the breathing. I also perform the exercise but still leading the meditation with my words to encourage members to fulfil the task, while observing them at the same time. There were always some participants that could not close their eyes, were scratching their nose, moving their bodies, looking here and there and getting irritated. After class, I quickly interviewed them to find out more about their dietary habits, including whether they consume coffee or sugar and so on.

Then I started to search for documentaries, surveys and earlier research projects that may have been conducted on yoga in Norway. I found two thesis, one of which belonged to Haugen (2016), which was helpful along the way to see what the results of their work was and how they prepared their questions. The one by Sigrid Steen Haugen is named “*Moving and Feeling (2016)*”, while the other one is “*Yoga Associated With Gene Expression In Immune Cells*”, by Carolyn Gregoire from Oslo University. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research related to the rate and number of yoga practitioners in Norway.

Along with that, I started to read the philosophy of yoga; I believed yoga itself could tell me and direct me to the right questions. I can say that the philosophy of Hinduism and especially yoga is one of the most complicated schools of philosophy to read and understand. Vedanta, Samkhya, Mahabharata, Bhagavadgītā, yoga sutras of Patañjali and so on; additionally, it was not easy to manage them all within a short period of time. I registered for an online course on the philosophy of yoga at the Oxford Center of Hindu Studies and, fortunately, it was very helpful. Before that I read several books from different writers, but after taking the course, I concentrated more on the course materials as it was completely what I needed. Dr. Nick Sutton presented the lectures base on a variety of books and writers, and my course supervisor, Daniel Simpson, answered all my questions in the best way he could.

The result was 26 questions, most of them open ended (please see Appendix B). I tried to make the questions as exploratory as possible. My goal was to identify patterns, themes or models that could provide an understanding of the phenomenon and later on help me to generate hypotheses. Through interviews and observation, I tried to qualitatively characterize the essential information and detailed experiences of the practitioners of the yoga classes in order to find in detail what shifts have occurred within this tradition from ancient times in India to modern life in Norway. Obviously, one important shift through this time is the changing role of women, which I mention in the section on observation; how freedom and feminism presented Western women with a great opportunity to play leading roles in the field of yoga. This then provides an initial understanding of my goals for this research project. At the heart of this project is the aim of using the qualitative methodology required to accurately convey the experience of participants, and hopefully reach a correct interpretation of what goes on behind the scenes.

### 3.4 Interviews

The interviews were pre-structured. I had all the questions I wanted to ask in front of me, nevertheless our conversations were flowing and natural, not a simple case of question and answer. Some of the questions were non-directive and open-ended. I was an active listener in order to keep the interviews focused on the main issues concerned.

The setting I chose for most of the interviews was SATS itself, except for two of them, for which we chose to go to the library.

It is true that I was an outsider in Norway but within almost one year of working at SATS, I became familiar with the setting and members. As a result, I did not need any gatekeeper or negotiation to introduce me to the field. It was easy to find informants and interview them; mostly this happened inside the club. I still see most of the interviewees every week. Interviews took approximately one hour. I received good information from the participants and in return I tried to give them some advice about Panchakarma (Ayurvedic cleansing methods), which I believe most yogis in Norway are not following. I chose as interview subjects those members who attended the classes regularly and who I knew were familiar with the concept of yoga; not those who incidentally attend yoga classes once a year. I tried to include informants from all age groups as follows: under 30, over 30 and over 45 and over 59. All our interviews took place more than once, and indeed anytime we see each other, we discuss different issues and new experiences which they share; this helped me to trace patterns of changes occurring within them over time.

My aim was to have a sample which represents the lifestyle of a yoga practitioner living in Norway today; how they see yoga and what their aspirations are in relation to yoga, health and lifestyle. Indeed, in the details I was searching to find the moral codes of yoga in their lifestyle, rather than just transcribing our conversation.

### **3.5 Recording and organizing the data**

I followed the traditional way to record my observations, handwritten in field notes at the end of the day. I recorded the interviews on my device and typed them directly into my laptop afterwards. My notes were mostly selective and related to the foreshadowed research problems and its backgrounds. My notes in the early days were quite general but later got more focused. The things which did not seem significant at the beginning became more meaningful later.

Transcription of the interviews was time-consuming; each of the interviews lasted more than one hour but thankfully the quality of the voices was excellent and there was no background noise. I listened to them several times and transcribed them in two different colors to separate them from the questions and make the later steps of confirmation and analysis easier. I stored all my observations in chronological order, interview transcripts, segmented texts and interview records. I recorded the interviews with a Sony IC recorder ICD-UX523F. Later on that proved helpful for categorizing the data and finding different themes according to the indexing and coding system.

Identification of categories was not easy but played an important role in the process of analysis. However the list of categories changed several times in the course of the research, but step by step as my work developed, I reached more abstract categories. So in the light of methodological and ethical considerations in a reflexive process I recorded, sorted and retrieved the data.

### **3.6 Analytic notes**

While I was listening to the interviews and reading the transcriptions of fieldnotes, some analytic ideas appeared in my mind, so I separately made note of them and used them during data analysis. I consciously retained a distinction between the analytic notes in my descriptions and the accounts provided by participants. It was important for me to regularly be engaged in improving my analytic ideas in order to sketch out a good research strategy and identify best ideas. The emergent feature of my work was the formulation of problems and hypotheses.

Therefore I let the collection of data and its analysis guide my inquiry towards a progressive focus and lead me to the clarification of the topics.

Through my diary I recorded both my personal feelings and a running account of the fieldwork. Different feelings of irritation, anxiety, tranquility, joy and comfort were analytically observable for myself as an instructor and significant in the classes. This often led me to long conversations with members after the classes, to listen to their experiences and ideas. By watching these feelings, it slowly became clear to me what was noteworthy and what was the obvious and mundane in this domain. Gradually my field notes become a vehicle for recording all the potential knowledge that I may face and have as an emotion or personal feelings or intellectual analysis. All these processes were extremely helpful in integrally leading me to the process of data analysis.

### **3.7 The process of analysis**

Indeed I started the analysis of data in the pre-fieldwork phase when I was trying to formulate the research problems and I continued it throughout the process of writing, so all the embodied ideas in my mind fed into the course of research. These lines from Malinowski were in my mind at every step, “if a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 67).

So as a substantive or empirical research, my efforts in the early stages of data analysis was concentrated on formulating and reformulating of the research problems and all those ideas initially motivated me to take the first steps, yet I was aware enough to accept potential changes along the way.

Managing the data gave me a good chance to think several times with all the materials that I had, in order to produce equally rich concepts and categories them in the right order. I did not stick to just one theoretical framework but with the help of all those ideas that were constantly coming to my mind from the beginning of my research in an iterative process, I made sense of the data and



during the course of time, analyzing them changed my ideas a lot. A back and forth movement between my ideas and the data I collected, an ongoing relationship at the heart of grounded theorizing was a helpful process to build some creative ideas for my project.

Many ideas emerged into my mind from the beginning of this research in pre fieldwork, observation, interviews and the preliminary analytic reflections on the data.

However, practically it was sometimes difficult to sustain the data analysis alongside initial steps of data collection.

### **3.8 Generating concepts**

Reading different sources related to yoga and reviewing the data was my routine task. It helped me for the process of analysis after organizing them by means of coding and indexing.

The process of analysis leads me to find some concepts which later on helped me to make sense of what is going on in all the data that I collected. I needed to know why, what is happening is happening, in an analytical way and try to develop a novel perspective on the phenomena that I was concerned with the help of previous and similar works.

Initially I was looking to see any interesting patterns in the data identified on the basis of previous works and theories that I faced, and with my common sense knowledge try to relate what people say and do to some category, concept or theory. “Useful analytical concepts sometimes arise 'spontaneously', being used by participants themselves. And, indeed, unusual participant terms are always worth following up, since they may mark theoretically important or interesting phenomena” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 458).

I acquired different categories and organized them as beginners, intermediate and advanced participants and it was likely a pattern of changes occurring within their physical, emotional and more interestingly in their food habits. However to a larger extent, when I analysed the questionnaires, the results were contradictory! I was expecting the advanced yoga practitioners to have a tendency to consume less meat or at least smaller animals, but the result of the questionnaires showed this not to be the case, and possibly the opposite: that beginners have a greater tendency to be vegetarian or vegan.

The next step was to begin to work with those categories which were likely central to my analysis. In order to identify important features in my analysis, theoretical ideas, common-sense expectations and stereotypes were crucial.

I was aware to develop the sort of ideas that make sense of grounded theorizing and that were going to give me a deeper clarification of what the participants are doing and expressing and why. Observing participants' actions and what they are sharing in different ways in our classes was also helpful in the later stage of the data analyses. Therefore I could identify different categories within those constructed situations and I could find their needs, interests and values as they were the actors of the situations. I was noticing how participants evaluate different situations, what is the meaning involved and how do they identify this routine activity? Are they having the feeling of belonging to a special group? What are their feelings after and before classes? How expensive is their equipment? Do they have any tattoos related to Hindu or yogic philosophy? Can they tolerate meditating without scratching and fidgeting? Can they trust the environment and close their eyes in shavasana pose? Is there any special ritual they follow? For example, most of the advanced members had their own special place at the class, always laying their yoga mat there, always coming before me in advance and laying down in shavasana pose or lotus to observe their breathing. In contrast to them, those who were late most of the time, with low capacity to focus, were often sitting over their mat looking at their phones. So I was observing to find out what is extreme, divergent, usual and unusual in this context through a variety of settings such as before class, during the class, after the class, food habits, physical exercise, spirituality, cleansing process and so on. Ultimately these different patterns of actions led me to understanding the different unwritten rules and norms in a variety of settings. Along the way, I was trying to generate a systematic interpretation of all these rules and norms and how these rules interpreted in actual situations. In order to generate categories, my focus was on actions and the meaning behind them that shapes the situations. My interviews and conversations with different participants were an important aspect of data collection, and my analysis of action also involved spoken actions.

### **3.9 Developing typologies**

I was trying to categorize different kinds of participants and interviewees and identify the patterns they follow and adopt in a routine way, in the classes as well as outside and even in the conversations and interviews. In this way, philosophy of yoga was so helpful again as the Vedic knowledge itself divided people into the three main categories or Dosha, vata, pitta and kapha and, depending on the age and food habits of participants, these qualities can be more extreme or normal. For example, Vata people like the sequence of our exercises to be faster while Kapha members liked slow movements with more meditation time.

As Lofland suggests ( Lofland 1970: 42-3), I invested plenty of time in understanding:

1. How participants deal with different aspects of yoga.
2. Find the variations in their strategies.
3. Classify the variations.
4. Writing them down in my thesis in an orderly named manner (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 483).

### **3.10 The process of writing**

Writing was an important part of my research. In all the stages, from pre-fieldwork and preparation of questions to my observations, memoranda and transcription of interviews, I tried to transform all those experiences that I have collected through this research from the beginning to a social science text. Despite the fact that it was very time-consuming, it was still very helpful in the process of analysis. I read in *Ethnography Principles in practice*, by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), that there are many ways to write about the social world and I was aware that there is no single best way to do it because social phenomena do not primarily appear in sections and chapters for our comfort and convenience.

The process of writing was unavoidably linked to reading, and indeed the process of reading enlightened my writing. Obviously it was important what to read and how to read. As an individual researcher, I could not make my own discipline afresh and escape the textual norms

and codes of the past as they are entirely helpful for me in defining a flowing way in order to produce a new understanding of today's phenomena. Therefore the discipline of writing was tangled to the reading process.

In the process of writing, I had to separate analytic themes to make sense of them before reintegrating and representing them in a social account. I collected a large amount of data through the interviews, memories, observations, and impressions; and it was a time-consuming process to transform this host of data to a linear text and construct a coherent account which provides enough detail and evidence. I organized my writing chronologically yet some portions are thematic.

### **3.11 Ethics**

The immediate aim of this research was and is the production of knowledge rather than any other political and professional pursuit. Truth was an inherent value in my research activity to produce a true account of the phenomenon under investigation, suitable and valuable to human concern. It concludes the consequences of all my behavior regarding the people studied and others.

I started all the interviews with informed consent, informing participants in the study that they were free to withdraw at any time they wanted, moreover my workplace posted on social media that I am carrying out a research project for my thesis on yoga. Plus that, by distributing short questionnaires among the participants, I believe everyone was aware that research was taking place in the environment and that I was a participant observer.

However, there is no clear-cut between public and private but still my observations occurred in a public place yet I did not reveal any private information in public. Names or any information which may cause the identification of the interviewees is confidential and remains secret.

Moreover I was aware that my research process from observations, interviews and establishing relationships, to the publication of findings shall not harm anyone or create anxiety or stressful situation for participants or even for myself.

I invited eleven people to be interviewed and I appreciate all the people that contributed their time and energy to this research thesis. Our interviews mostly took one hour each, plus that on

and off I got back to them in order to receive additional information; they were always kind and helpful. I tried to conduct this communication in a positive way and in return give them some advice regarding the history and philosophy of yoga, yoga exercises, etc. As a social researcher, I respected and appreciated all the settings that I was allowed to access and people studied and observed during the course of this research.

### **3.12 My view**

Other than the set of methodological rules for this research, I tried to look, listen and think as a researcher about this particular social phenomenon; to acquire an analytical mentality along the process of research; to observe details but seek to understand them all as a unique social event and not fall down in the details; and try not to jump to conclusions quickly, to maintain the purpose of my inquiry.

While I was seeking to generate theoretical ideas for my thesis, I was trying to identify yoga as a process in the West and especially in Norway. As people are still seeking to find their proper place within this exercise, I tend to see the process also in this activity and do not just judge the result; and see the future possibilities as well. For example, I see new beginners in yoga may choose to eat smaller animals like fish and chicken rather than beef which is more heavy and detrimental in this perspective; and that they continue thus for several years before deciding to be a vegetarian. Therefore I try to see it as movements and shifts toward a more spiritual and yogic lifestyle, rather than just a choice of food and taste.

## **4 Theoretical aspects**

### **4.1 Academic study of yoga**

The theoretical part of this research is mostly based on the ideas of Gavin Flood, De Michelis and Mark Singleton. However for exploring the details of my research, especially the spiritual part, the ideas of Iyengar, Jois and Anandamurti were helpful.

Singleton explains that from the 1990s, the academic study of yoga started to be explored within social sciences (2010, p.16).

De Michelis (2004) points out that important dates and incidents in the modern era caused shifts in the tradition of yoga. This started around 1750 with the rise of colonial interest in the East and extension of the authority of the West over the East which resulted in a variety of cultural contacts. Later on, cultural contacts around 1850 brought an important shift where Asian religions started to be practiced outside their original main geographical area. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of the World's Religions, became an overnight spiritual star in Europe and America and attracted attention toward yogic traditions, which was followed by the publication of his book in 1896, called Raja Yoga. His book, at the beginning of the twentieth century, forms the emergence of early modern yoga. From 1915 to 1949, two world wars took place, there was a slowdown of movements, and India found independence. This was a starting point for promoting the native and traditional spirituality in Europe and USA. Around 1960, counterculture became widespread and new forms of yoga developed. Around 1990, a new generation of western practitioners brought more growth to the tradition of yoga. De Michelis considers four aspects of modern yoga, as follows: first, she explains modern yoga as an unstable mixture of western and eastern science, esoteric ideas with Dharmic and Abrahamic religions. Second is the role of privatization of religion and its influence on yoga, to mention, believing without belonging or spiritual but not religious (De Michelis, 2004, p. 181-205). Consumers tend to select certain parts or themes of a system or tradition to build their own ideas. Third is the process of commodification forced by capitalism and globalization to support consumer society, where different groups and gurus promote their own style of yoga and meditation, and compete

to earn followers and practitioners. Fourth is medicalization, an alternative therapy in the field of body and mind to improve personal or even collective wellbeing with a large amount of literature and the appearance of denominational yoga.

## **4.2 Research aim and questions**

In this research I would like to explore what yoga is for the average Norwegian? Is it spirituality or sport? How do they adopt it in their everyday life? Do they practice the moral codes of this tradition? Where is the place of body and health in this regular practice? What is the place of the sacred and the mundane? In which way do practitioners in Norway employ yoga to serve them? I will go through different texts in this research, while my main intention is to go behind the scenes and find out the relationship between bodily or health oriented practice of yoga with spirituality, and to examine the place of the sacred and the mundane. The ideas of Gavin Flood cast a great light along the path of my research, particularly the following books: *The Ascetic Self Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (2004), *The Tantric Body, The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion* (2006), *The importance of religion: meaning and action in our strange world* (2012), *The Bhagavad Gita, a new translation* by Gavin Flood (2012), and *Religion and the Philosophy of Life* (2019). *Yoga Body The Origins Of Modern Posture Practice*, by Mark Singleton (2010) and *Roots of Yoga, Translated and Edited with an Introduction by James Mallinson and Mark Singleton* (2017) helped me to understand the history of yoga. Further books were, *Light on Life* (2005) by B.K.S. Iyengar, *Yoga Mala* (2002) by Sri K. Pattabhi Jois and *Guide to Human Conduct* (2006) by Anandamurti which were helpful for me to understand the moral codes of yoga. Finally, the course Philosophy of Yoga that I took at The Oxford Center of Hindu Studies in November 2018 assisted me in handling this research project. As it appears in the classical texts such as Upanishads, Mahabharata, Gita and Yoga Sutras, yoga has more connection to the Samkhya system of thought than Vedic doctrine. The philosophy of Samkhya is based on the dualistic idea. The separation of Purusha and Prakriti or Brahman and Atman, what Durkheim called sacred and mundane but this dualists idea later on shifts to Advaita or non dualists doctrine offered by Vedanta. Purusha and Prakriti, Braman and atman become one and joined

each other in non dualistic philosophy of Vedanta and this idea expands more in the tantric doctrine where health becomes sacred.

Body and health play an important role in the classical texts of yoga, therefore we can see the notions of asana and pranayama in all these texts, from the Upanishads to Sutras. But much of the emphasis in the classical texts is on the mind and soul rather than the body. Out of 195 verses of Sutras, only four of them are related to the practice of asana and pranayama and the rest of them are about cessation of the mind and liberation from suffering and rebirth. (Philosophy of Yoga, November 2018, p. 1-3).

### **4.3 Divinization of the body**

From 300 to 600 AD, Hinduism faced a new philosophy called Tantrism. “In this new philosophy body received more attention. The goal of tantric practices was to transcend the body. Purusha and Prakriti merged to each other and body received a sacred status in this new way of thinking.” (Philosophy of yoga, November 2018 p. 121-147). Gavin Flood (2006, p. 74) calls it “The Divinization of the body”. He wishes to understand the tantric body in this tradition in its way to liberation and how the body transforms through tantric techniques. (Flood, 2006, p. 1-2). Flood believes divinization of the body is essential in tantric culture. (Flood, 2006, p. 2).

Tantric doctrine had a great effect on Hatha Yoga, therefore we can say that Hatha Yoga has a closer connection to the tantric knowledge than the Vedic doctrine. This was the attempt of Hatha Yoga in the last 1000 years to divinize the body and transcend humankind. The main parts of this yoga were complex visualizations, chanting mantras and different pranayama or breathing exercises. The goal of these exercises were to make the body ready to worship and transform the inner energy of the body to merge with the divine in extended meditations (Philosophy of Yoga, November 2018 p. iii).

Singleton describes the modern Hatha Yoga compared to the model outlined from the scriptures has more attention on asanas and the fitness part of yoga as a system of health, and less concentration on mudras or pranayama. (Singleton 2010, p. 29).



#### 4.4 Modern yoga

Singleton explains that Raja Yoga of Swami Vivekananda rejected the physical practice of Hatha Yoga in 1896 was a turning point. Vivekananda asserts about Hatha Yoga, “we have nothing to do with it here, because its practices are very difficult, and can not be learned in a day, and, after all, do not lead to much spiritual growth” (Singleton 2010, p71). Vivekananda believed doing yoga for health benefits and the betterment of life is an “inferior goal” for those who are seeking spiritual enlightenment. (Singleton 2010, p71). Indeed Vivekananda has made a division between the physical practices of Hatha yoga and the spiritual side of the Raja Yoga. Vivekananda believes practicing different postures of Hatha yoga is a secular act and has nothing to do with spirituality. (Singleton 2010, p71).

Vivekananda at the Washington Hall, San Francisco, on March 16, 1900 explained: “There are some sects called Hatha-Yogis. They say the greatest good is to keep the body from dying. Their whole process is clinging to the body” (Singleton, 2010,p. 71).

A similar account is given by Max Weber in his book, *Religions of India* from 1909, in which he introduced hatha yoga as “an inferior relative of classical that is, orthodox, and Vaishnav.” (Singleton, 2010, p. 43). Weber 1909 explains that the primary secular needs, such as health and wealth, from a religion instead of spirituality is a misuse of religion. “This essentially secular demand for security and sustenance from religious practice, rather than a meaningful life or spiritual perfection, is corruption of the religious drive” (Turner, 2011, p. 287). In the same way Muller explains, “it sounds like a degradation of the very name of religion to apply it to the wild ravings of Hindu Yogins or the blank blasphemies of Chinese Buddhists.” (Müller 1881: 16, vol. p. 35). Singleton believes modern yoga in recent times has descended into physical practices and degenerated from its pure spiritual form (Singleton 2010, p. 76).

## 4.5 Sacred health

It seems the shift to the bodily oriented and physical culture was a major change and is observable in different areas of religious studies and sociology; as Robertson (2001) asserts, “the body in secular society is simply a blank screen on to which we inscribe various ideas and practices, typically connected to consumption” (Turner, 2011, p. 285).

Singleton explains: “yoga in mainstream western physical culture. The motto of the health and strength league, sacred thy body even as thy soul, might well be the first lesson in hatha yoga” (Singleton, 2010, p. 153).

Here I would like to add that divinisation of the body, which has been offered by tantrism and later on practiced in Hatha Yoga, was aligned with the demand of consumer society and body played a sacred and transitional role both in Hatha Yoga and secular society to give an opportunity for yoga to flourish around the world. But it is the demand of society and it is society also that has shaped the idea of health oriented activities. Indeed health was and is the main issue of the informants in my project and I may say, society looks for health and prosperity and yoga, as a religious oriented practice, simply offers it to them. However the practitioners are not aware and even their choice is to be secular and not religious or spiritual. Flood explains, “Durkheim offered a famous definition of religion as the sacred, things set apart, and he distinguished beliefs from rites, thinking that rites depend upon beliefs” (2019, p. 18). But sacred is not something set apart anymore, at least in the recent practice of yoga. The body is sacred. Rites are followed as a way to improve health.

Flood says, “for Durkheim and Bellah, the term ‘sacred’ is something set apart from mundane life and is an important term in understanding the connection between religion and life” (2019, p. 66). Nevertheless yoga is not a religion today but Dr Nick Sutton (2019) explains “the spiritual discipline of yogic practice is not a religion in itself, but traditional texts often teach its techniques alongside religious doctrine.” (Philosophy of yoga, p. iii). On the other hand, there is no doubt yoga that is not a religion – at least for those people whom I interviewed. Out of 98 questionnaires, no one claimed yoga is a religion for him or her. Even spirituality is not a serious

matter. They may enter the domain of spirituality as it supports their health, nothing more. Indeed health is the main idea behind the scenes.

Flood explains “this is not only to see sacredness as something set aside, as Durkheim would have it” (2019, p. 345). Indeed this is the conclusion I came to as well in my findings. In what we practice as yoga today, the body is sacred, health is sacred, the betterment of emotions is sacred and all these things are not something set aside as religious. Flood adds, “the sacred is thus not an exclusively religious sphere” (2019, p. 345).

Participants like to learn the techniques of yoga to prolong their life and improve their health; according to my understanding of what Flood explains, this is the purpose of religion: to firstly improve our lives, improve our health by prohibiting something and offering other things, and by this way lead the followers to a correct lifestyle.

Flood (2019), in his most recent book *Religion And The Philosophy Of Life*, gives an interesting ideas about the modern health oriented society.

The Indo-European linguist, Émile Benveniste, analyses the sacred in various Indo-European languages showing that while there is no common term for ‘religion’, there are accounts of the sacred that usually come in pairs, namely in Greek hieros and hagnos, in Latin sacer and sanctus, and in Avestan spenta and yaozdata. These terms reflect a double meaning to sacrality; on the one hand, the sacred points to a vital power and state of fullness and prosperity, a state of health, denoted by the first term in the pairs, while on the other, it denotes the sacred as juridical power that controls the vital power of life (2019, p. 66).

Flood refers to the Italian political philosopher Roberto Esposito (2017) to further explore the relationship between human bodies and societies, “in Esposito’s reading of Benveniste, these two aspects, what is animated and what is forbidden, come together in the notion of immunity that articulates the function of religion to keep people safe” (Flood 2019, p. 66).

Flood adds “ultimately religion as the sacred heals life through ‘the absorption of something that binds it to its opposite, that draws life from death or includes death in life’” (2019, p. 66). In later lines he gives a complementary explanation about the true nature of the sacred in our modern life, “On the one hand, the sacred is a celebration of the wellspring of life itself, that which is

animated by life, while on the other hand, the sacred is control of life through prohibition and injunction” (Flood 2019, p. 66).

This ancient terminology reflects a truth about religion as having roots within life itself or, more specifically, within the biosociology of human evolution, and also controlling life through prohibition and injunction, commandments, and rules. Expression of life and control of life are both part of the function of sacrality or holiness; the sacred is the appearance of life itself along with the attempted control of that life. It is the emergence of religion in terms of both expression and control that links religion through the sacred to the bio-energy of life itself that animates human sociality. Put in rather bold terms, it is this source, life itself, that the sacred transforms and attempts to control, to which religion can be traced (Flood, 2019, p. 66).

When I compare my findings with the ideas of Flood, especially in his last book *Religion And The Philosophy Of Life (2019)*, I interpret health in this background and – at least for Flood – as not simply a secular and mundane aspect of life. Indeed, I would argue, along with Flood (2019), that health is sacred, and an attempt to sustain the body and have a healthier lifestyle might be a religious or spiritual act. According to my findings, all the interviewees in a variety of ways expressed that doing yoga has improved their health but they directly assert that yoga is not a religion for them. Even analysis of the questionnaires shows that practicing yoga is developing the health of participants in different ways, but none of the 98 people who answered the questionnaires chose yoga as a religious practice. But according to the findings in my thesis, yoga is improving the health of the practitioners and according to Flood (2019), health is sacred and participation in the development of health might be a sacred activity. Therefore I may argue that while the yoga participants may not be aware or society may not expect it, yoga is functioning as a religious act in society and improving the sacred domain of life even if individuals are not aware of it.

## **5 Observations**

I have divided my findings and analyses into three distinct categories. First observation, then interviews and finally short questionnaires. My aim is first to give a clear understanding of what is going on in the background of my research and then show what I have found through the interviews. I decided to write my observations in a thematic way to give more space and energy to the important themes that I observed in the period of my work as a yoga instructor. In this part, I will try to give a clear understanding of the main factors which play an influential role in the domain of this research and create a possibility for readers to comprehend the interview part better.

### **5.1 SATS as a research setting**

In 2017, SATS launched the concept of HiYoga in Oslo, which is a professional center of teaching yoga. Other than a variety of yoga classes such as yoga flow, yin yoga, groovy yoga, easy yoga, there are other group trainings offered by SATs like Indoor running, Body for life, Cycling, Body Pump, ABSolution, Cross Training, Cardio Energy, Power Step, and core 30. Depending on the center, they may have an average of 40 to 60 group trainings per week, of which approximately four to six are yoga classes. Members can train individually also according to their needs and wishes, and personal trainers are always available to help them.

### **5.2 SATS environment**

When we talk about the environment of yoga classes, it is mostly related to different settings created in order to consciously influence the unconscious of the participants. As I explained above, in the nature of SATs, the environment is definitely sport oriented rather than offering any spirituality, and this may directly affect the mindset of the participants. From the entrance, you are met with photos of muscular athletes encouraging members to do their exercises, then different proteins, shakes and snacks available for sale next to the well-designed costly sport

clothes, which only fit if you train hard every day. Background music is tense and loud, mixed with the noise of ventilation and heavy weights, lifting by bodybuilders, or the indoor running program and the running instructor shouting to encourage members to run and maintain the program. These are brief examples of the setting at SATS which is often far from spiritual. All these influences may push individuals to be more sport oriented rather than looking for spirituality. The fact is that silence is essential when we want to have a good yoga class, which can make participants calm and relaxed and create a calm atmosphere for them.

The setting definitely does not represent a traditional yoga atmosphere. In some SATS branches, the front wall of the class is made of glass. This means that yoga practitioners are observable from outside and the participants cannot relax due to the feeling that they can be observed from outside. Another issue is that the ceiling of the class is so high and therefore does not give a feeling of safeness to the practitioners.

The positive thing is that every SATS branch is well structured and clean. This tidiness of the area creates a space for members to calm down and consequently influences their minds and their bodies to relax. Decorations in the yoga halls are minimal which is good; just some candles, which the manager recently exchanged with electric ones. Lights and spotlights are well designed and can be modified and controlled.

Generally, the manager of group training conducts the yoga classes at a time of the day when there is minimum noise disruption and this is a smart decision, however in some centres members complain that the ventilation system is loud and distracting.

Yoga instructors are allowed to play soft music for the participants. Participants claim that this background music is helpful in the yoga classes in order to guide the members into deeper relaxation. Instructors may only use the music SATS provides on Swedebeat, but I have heard it repeatedly said that members get bored and would like to hear new and diverse music in their yoga classes. Members like soft instrumental music, like the Bansuri flute and shruti box.

Several times I have used incense in my classes, however members didn't like it. I talked to some of them about it and they said they have never used such a thing and it may not be healthy to breathe in this strong-smelling smoke.

### **5.3 Class types**

I have experienced leading three different yoga classes at SATS: Yoga Flow, Yin Yoga and Groovy yoga. My interviews and observations are based upon Yoga Flow, because it was the only available class at the time I was collecting the data. Later on, I gathered some observations regarding the latter two concepts, some of which I will share here in different sections when it is required. I will explain more about the nature of yoga flow below.

#### **5.3.1 Yoga Flow**

Yoga Flow is based on the Vinyasa Flow. Vinyasa yoga is the systematic linkage between movement of asanas and breathing which is introduced by Krishnamacharya (Yoga Mala, 2002, p. 14). Indeed, most of the definitions say that vinyasa is the dynamic movements of asanas synchronizing with breath. But in contrast, Mallinson and Singleton assert that, "vinyasa is the linkage of asanas with repeating mantras. The compound vinyāsakrama, which has been used by Krishnamacharya and his students to denote a particular sequence of linking poses, is not found in pre-modern yoga texts" (2017, p 435).

It looks like the systematic linkage of asanas is something new in the history of yoga. Recitation of mantras with asanas has been dropped and is no longer being practiced but replaced by concentration on breathing in, holding the breath and breathing out.

The fact is that the variety of flow sequences of asanas are what participants are really looking forward to practice. As I experienced, most of the participants are not interested in practicing pranayama or observing their breath. Members like dynamic movements, quick and effective, and yoga flow gives it to them. My observations show they don't even like to start the classes with chanting the mantra OM, because they feel it is not functional or it is fancy and even awkward to do it out loud in front of others in class.

Yoga flow in SATS is pre-choreographed and is one of the most popular group training. We start the classes with gentle and softer movements and progressively turn to the more challenging asanas like balance poses, inversions and may end up with some rotations and deeper stretching.

Generally, the pace of exercise depends on the instructor, it may be slow or faster, and here is the starting point for many discussions and arguments. Most of the members have no patience to remain in the poses to observe their breathing and want to jump from one pose to the next. If the pace of sequences is slow, they feel irritated. There are several participants that cannot remain in a single pose for five deep breaths. If I do, so they come to me after class and ask for the class to be more flow - for them flow means a fast sequence of asanas, which is opposed to the authentic yoga flow.

My observations show that remaining for three counting numbers in the poses with a proper linkage of asanas can make the class like a dynamic moving meditation and the majority of members feel happy and comfortable after the section is finished. Maintaining the pace of movements is the most essential thing an instructor should control, not a lazy movement and not rushing through asanas, but finding a balance for the class, regardless of the age of the participants and the nature of the time, and hence, be attentive to their breathing and achieve mental focus during the exercises.

#### **5.4 Yoga and gender**

Mallinson and Singleton (2017) state that most of the texts belonging to this tradition have been written by male practitioners, therefore it is not easy to estimate to what degree women were practicing yoga in earlier time. There are many pre-modern depictions of male practitioners showing yogic postures but there are almost no depiction of female practitioners of yoga. Women never prohibited from practicing yoga, but the Hatha Yoga texts explain that male yogis should stay away from female practitioners. They also add that there is some evidence that women were practicing yoga from the earlier periods as long as they have no attention to the issue of gender either for themselves or to their partners. It is also said that in the pre-modern stages, women and Shudras (the lowest of the four varnas) were allowed to practice some breathing exercises (pranayama) and chant non-Vedic mantras. (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, p. 53-54).



Singleton explains, “The principle of stretching was an integral part of the modern Western physical culture revival from the mid-nineteenth century onward and became increasingly associated with women’s gymnastics”. (2010, p. 158).

In the yoga classes at SATS, although usually full, less than 10% of the participants are men. Many male members who train at SATS everyday believe yoga is an exercise for women. Although they admit all the health benefits of yoga, they still avoid attending the class. They mostly argue, yoga is not a decent and proper workout, I’m not enough flexible to do yoga, I feel clumsy inside the yoga class, and I do not have enough time to do yoga also next to the other regular exercises.

The dichotomy between men’s and women’s physical activities carries forward a gender division formalized in the earliest expressions of modern European gymnastics, in which men are primarily concerned with strength and vigor while women are expected to cultivate physical attractiveness and graceful movement. (Singleton, 2010, p. 161).

Generally, my observations show that men have a stronger guard against religious practices, spiritual experiences and unfamiliar names and terms. Some men say yoga is too soft for a man.

## **5.5 Nature of the time**

Mallinson and Singleton (2017) write that a yogi should not undertake yoga practice in winter, in the cool season, in summer or during the rainy season. “It is taught that one should undertake yoga in spring or autumn. Yoga will be successful then and the yogi is sure to be freed from disease” (2017, p. 62).

I would like to add, regarding the quality of the time, that dependent on whether it is morning, afternoon or evening, yoga classes should be modified. However, pre-choreographed classes have no room for adjustment in relation to the quality of the time or time of day. Therefore, the time of day was neglected when they designed the yoga classes at SATS. This means that the yoga classes in the morning are similar to the yoga classes in the evening. By considering the quality of time, yoga classes might be more effective and useful. This idea is applicable for seasons also; the type of yoga one undertakes in winter may be different from summer but SATS

does not consider these variations in the classes.

The idea of Gunas, which Mallinson and Singleton (2017) explain as “one of the three qualities that are present in varying proportions in all things” (2017, p. 438), and the application of them has been missed in designing the yoga classes. Correct understanding of these is helpful to adopt the right quality of the time for the yoga classes.

The last thing about the nature of the time is that, traditionally, yoga classes remain closed in full moon and new moon. This is also not considered in yoga classes in SATS.

## **5.6 Nature of food**

Mallinson and Singleton explain that diet has tremendous importance for the practitioners of yoga if they want to be successful in yoga. Rice, wheat flour, beans and specially mung, chickpeas and Amal are some of the examples they mentioned. I asked about eating habits in my interviews and discussed this topic with many participants of the yoga classes. For example, about the amla and pomegranate, none of them ever ate amla and they mostly did not remember when they last ate pomegranate. Indeed, none of them were following a Sattvic diet and most of their food habits consist of Tamasic and Rajasic food. Lemon and garlic is prohibited along with meats and fats. Food should be light (Sattvic) (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, p. 62-63).

## **6 Research Findings**

I will represent the result of the interviews in three parts. Physical health, mental health and spiritual health. Because health was the main issue, I present them in this manner. I start the findings with physical health because it received more attention than the others topics from the informants, and spiritual health received relatively less attention from the informants. By dividing the data in these three categories, I had more freedom to place my findings in the appropriate place and represent them in an understandable manner to give the readers an exact account of what informants explained about their experiences and where these experiences can be found in the concept of yoga. Interviews were pre-structured with open ended questions, and were mainly conducted at different branches of SATS. I randomly choose eleven members for the interviews among those who were participating in the classes on a regular base. All the informants are women. Unfortunately, there were no men attending yoga classes regularly who were willing to be interviewed.

### **6.1 Physical health**

I started with physical health because it was the main issue among the informants. But what do they mean by health? And how far can we go to spirituality by concentrating on health? Iyengar divided health for yogis into five branches: physical health, moral health, intellectual health, health of consciousness and divine health (2005, p. 23). But I decided to categorize health in three main divisions: physical, mental and spiritual, because it was simpler to talk about it with the informants and observe it and write about it this way. Iyengar firstly prioritises physical health because he believes divine health must be built upon a sound physical health (Iyengar, 2005, p. 23). Therefore I also started with physical health, however the main focus of the participants in both interviews and short questionnaires was physical health.

Thus health was a good starting point for the interviews, and taking into consideration Iyengar's described. He also adds that Asanas also have three main duties and their most important one is

to make our body strong, then our intelligence sharp and ultimately keep our spirit alive (Iyengar, 2005, p. 24).

He states, “as long as the body is not in perfect health, you are caught in body consciousness alone. This distracts you from healing and culturing the mind. We need sound bodies so we can develop sound minds.” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 24).

The most popular goal among the informants was flexibility. The rest of them are as follows: getting relaxed, finding strength, getting fit, improving balance and coordination, sleeping well and breathe deeper. The following goals have also been mentioned by the informants individually but were not popular among all of them. Still I will write them below to give a wider insight into the mindset of the informants regarding the physical benefits of yoga. They are as follows: fight aging, detoxification, balance in blood pressure, constipation relief, leading me to a healthier lifestyle especially in eating habits, internal and external massage of the body, receiving energy, overall health improvement, feeling younger, healing, socializing, illness prevention, a cheap way to increase the quality of life and to increase bone density.

In looking at the data collected through closed surveys, of which I had 98 respondents, I gathered the following results:

Six survey respondents were men: six percent. On the issues of physical training, none of the men chose the response indicating it is only physical training (Det er bare fysisk trening for meg). This means that yoga is not only a physical practice, at least for those six men, but that yoga is something more. Three of these men, in response to the question about spirituality (Det er åndelig for meg) indicated that yoga is a kind of spirituality for them. Still, none of them claimed to have any sense of belonging to a special group of people as all six responded no in answer to this question (Jeg føler at jeg tilhører en spesielt gruppe mennesker).

Eight women were in the age group 18-29. This was the lowest number in comparison to the other age groups of women. Three of the members of this age group indicated that yoga is just physical training for them. At the same time, all the members of this age group chose the answer that they are coming to the yoga classes to receive energy. Three of the members have chosen the answer that it is only physical training (Det er bare fysisk trening for meg). Two of the women in this age group chose that yoga is a spiritual practice for them. In this age group, only one out of

eight have the feeling of belonging to a special group of people. It may be that some of them belong to a special group of people but they might not recognise it as such, because in the current global world, the use of internet and social media is such a common way to be engaged with various practices and ideas without considering it a way of belonging to a special group of people. The question is, therefore, how I, as the researcher, can interpret whether they belong to a special way of thinking or special group of people. For example, when I checked the food habits for this age group, it was particularly interesting to note that they have the highest rate of being vegetarian in comparison to the other age groups. In this age group, 25% of them claim to be vegetarian despite the fact that being vegetarian in combination with attending yoga classes increases the possibility of belonging to a special way of thinking or special group of people.

There were 25 women surveyed who were in the age group of 30-44. Four of them wrote that yoga is only physical training for them. This means that for 21 of them, yoga is something more than a physical training. By analysing their goals for attending the yoga classes, it seems that this age group is the most stressed age group in my study, because 23 members of this age group claim they come to yoga classes to get relaxed (å bli avslappet). Twenty people in this age group claim that receiving energy is one of their main goals for attending the yoga classes. In this age group, no one wrote that yoga is religious practice for them and nobody claimed to have a feeling of belonging to a special group of people, however six women in this group wrote that yoga is a spiritual practice for them. In conversations with my yoga class attendees, I find that when I share my yoga experience with them from the perspective of a Hindu, it quickly appears that we have a lot in common and in this way they are happy to accept me as an insider and as a part of their group, as they are welcoming to accept an outsiders' sharing yoga tradition and Sanskrit jargon. However, from their Norwegian perspective, they do not consider themselves as belonging to a special group of people outside of their Scandinavian context. Out of 98 people who responded to the questionnaires, only 3 of them identified with the feeling of belonging to a special group of people.

One of the things I have noticed among Norwegian yogis is that having tattoos is a must for them, despite the fact that, traditionally, tattoos have no place in the world of yoga.

The biggest group in the survey was women in the age group of 45-59, with 30 respondents. This age group is more concerned than other age groups with health. Out of 30, 26 wrote that they come to yoga classes to improve their health. Mental health received less attention from this age group in comparison with physical health. Eighteen out of 30 wrote that they attend yoga classes for mental health, in contrast to the women age 18-29. For women in the age group 18-29, mental health is more important than physical health. I would argue that physical health is more important, in the sense that physical health aids in bringing mental health.

It is observable that physical and mental health have a close relationship in the questionnaires, correlated to the age of the participants. When the age of the questionnaire participants is higher, their attention to overall health is higher and attention to, particularly mental health, is less. For example, 90% of age group +60 write that they attend yoga classes to improve their health, but only 60% of them write that they attend yoga classes for improvement of their mental health. Comparatively, age group 45-59 shows 80% for physical health and 60% for mental health. In the age group of 30-44, there is 84% for physical health and 80% for mental health. The age group of 18-29 shows something different, with more attention on mental health rather than physical health, as 90% write that their reason for attending yoga classes is to improve their mental health and 78% write that their goal is to improve physical health.

In the age group of 45-59, eight people or 26%, wrote that yoga is just physical training for them. This means that for 74% of this age group, yoga is more than just physical training. Furthermore, 26% claimed yoga is spirituality for them; 77% write that they come to yoga classes to receive energy; 70% write that their reason for attending yoga classes is to have harmony and 70% write that they come to the classes to get relaxed.

There are 15 women in the age group of +60. Health issues are the highest priority for them. Eighty-seven percent write that physical health is their goal (For å forbedre helse min). Five out of 15 (33%) write that yoga is only physical training for them. Three people, or 20%, note that yoga is spirituality for them, however still none considers herself as belonging to a special group of people and none consider yoga as religion for her. Mental health received the lowest attention in this age group in comparison to the other groups. In this age group, 80% note that their goal for

attending yoga classes is to become relaxed and 73% state that their reason for attending the classes is to receive energy.

### **6.1.1 Flexibility**

The type of yoga we are dealing with in this thesis is yoga flow. It was designed by Basia Lipska Larsen in 2017 and introduced by HiYoga in Norway. Yoga flow is a pre-choreographed program with 50% intensity, 75% strength, 0% stamina, 25% choreography and 100% flexibility (SATS.no). Therefore it was not surprising to see that for most of the informants, flexibility was one main and common goal. We should not forget that SATS is a training center and according to my findings, most of the members of SATs and the informants that I interviewed are participating in different group trainings and classes in order to achieve different purposes, such as building muscles, improving cardiovascular system, burning fat and so on. In this sense, they combine a variety of trainings with yoga classes to achieve their desired goals in having a more balanced and tuned body. The fact is that flexibility is not the only thing they are looking for; still my data shows it is at the top of the wish list.

For example, one of the interviewees explained flexibility brought more comfort to her life by reducing the pain in her lower back. Another woman explained that before she started attending the yoga classes, she experienced spasm attacks every two or three months, but since she began attending the yoga classes, she almost never experienced them again. One woman explained that she could not keep her arms straight before, but over time by improvement of her flexibility in the yoga classes she got better. Looking at the short questionnaires, there was no question regarding flexibility, because at the time of preparing the survey questions, I had no idea that flexibility might receive more attention, but still eight members wrote at the bottom of the paper that flexibility is important for them in attending yoga classes. This means that those people's express goal for attending the yoga classes is to gain flexibility and thus they decided to make a special note of it and write it down on the bottom of the paper.

All those bends, twists and stretches are certainly important for them to increase their range of movements and as a result make them leaner and more comfortable in their bodies. In yoga

practices, the muscles get stretched in different ways; the body will adopt it over the course of time, and as a result, one might report feel relatively more open inside the body, especially in the area of the pelvic floor, which my observations show is an area where many Norwegians lack flexibility.

Informants expressed different motives for gaining flexibility. At the top is improvement of muscular performance, to prevent back pain, especially the area behind the neck and shoulders, to have a better body shape with a straight back, not a rounded back, easier movement and, as a result, less injuries. These poses were repeatedly reported to be helpful, effective and even challenging for them: pigeon pose or Eka Pada Rajakapotasana, butterfly pose or Baddha Konasana, forward bend or Uttanasana and seated wide-legged or Upavistha Konasana.

### **6.1.2 Getting relaxed**

These are the words that I heard a lot from the informants “to get relaxed”. They used it for their minds as well as their body, therefore I will discuss it both in terms of physical health and mental health. Iyengar (2005) explains that relaxation starts from the body and from there it moves to the relaxation of the mind. If our body is not flexible, our mind can't be flexible and relaxed. He explains that even in the difficult asanas, a yogi should remain relaxed. He denotes the relaxation of our tongue and throat in our body will directly result in relaxation in the brain (Iyengar 2005, p. 38-40).

Most of the interviewees, ten out of eleven, expressed that it is a must for them to attend the yoga class at least once a week to relax and release the tension from their body. When they come to the classes after a long vacation, the first thing they tell me is that “I need relaxation”. It looks like they need to experience that state of relaxation to find themselves again. Or they say “after one week of work, Fridays are good to do yoga and keep relaxed and release the stress of work”. When I talk about the relaxation of the body, the most important thing I have experienced is that when I asked people to keep their throat relaxed, they mostly have no idea how to keep that area of the neck relaxed. The other part is the tongue. I received this response from the informants of



the interviews that, “I never thought to keep my tongue relaxed”. Another part is the jaw. All the informants expressed that during the day, their jaw muscles are contracted while they are not aware of it, but over time they become more aware of it and practice keeping it softer. These are small details that help individuals to keep their body more relaxed.

Looking at the questionnaires from the men, two things which received 100% attention from the participants are: one is (å bli avslappet) “to become relaxed” and the other one is (for å få energi) to receive energy. Maybe there is a correlation between getting relaxed and receiving energy, because both of these two happen when we are connected to our self and yoga practice creates a condition in the class for the participants to experience it, and in my opinion, it is the difference between yoga classes and other group training classes.

Sixty two percent of women in the age group of 18-29 choose becoming relaxed as their goal for attending yoga classes, yet 100% of them wrote that receiving energy is their main goal. The data in the short questionnaires indicates that 38% of this age group are coming to the yoga classes to receive energy while it is not as important for them to get relaxed. Women 30-44 in the short questionnaires have the highest demand for being relaxed at 92%, while 80% wrote that receiving energy is their goal for participating in yoga classes. Of Women 45-59, 70% wrote that their reason for attending yoga classes is to become relaxed, while 77% wrote their goal is to receive energy. Maybe individuals are not aware or maybe they are fully aware of it, but I think receiving energy from practicing yoga might have a connection with how deep they can be relaxed because I believe the source of energy is inside them and it is internal and whenever they get relaxed, they might receive more energy afterward. This is my reason for analyzing these two items together. Women plus 60 in the short questionnaires: 80% of the respondents wrote that their goal for attending the yoga classes is to get relaxed and 73% wrote their goal is to receive energy.

I have observed in my classes, asana, pranayama, physical and mental parts are intertwined with each other by the means of different breathing exercises. When we keep our body relaxed, we can decrease the thoughts per minute and this consequently leads our minds to a more relaxed condition and our heart rate and blood pressure go down. Our body feels more relaxed and comfortable. Some informants call it “ease in body”, or “ease the pains”. One of the informants

expressed that it helped her to keep her jaw relax and stop her from grinding her teeth at night. I can say yoga, for some of the informants, is a mind-body series of exercises which gives discipline to both their mind and their body and finally leads them to a more relaxed body and mind.

### **6.1.3 Strength improvement**

The other most important physical aspect that practitioners were looking to develop through yoga exercises is strength. Nonetheless none of the informant's aim was purely to get stronger by participating in the yoga classes; indeed they don't want to only get flexible but looking at these two goals in a complimentary manner to balance their body, not to only be bendy and loose but to be vigorous and stable also and hopefully attain a balance between these. For example, one of the informants expressed that she likes to have a strong body but not really like to look muscular and the muscles she gains through light exercises like yoga is more desirable for her.

Another participant of the the interviews expressed that, since she has been attending yoga classes, she got stronger in the areas of hand and shoulders. The other women in the interviews expressed "definitely yoga has made her stronger, especially in the core muscles and the area of middle body". Gaining strength is what all the informants directly answered in the question of 'what is your goal for doing yoga?', as one of their goals is to improve their overall strength, more clearly making their core stronger.

Downward-facing dog and its transition to the upward facing dog was reported as one of their favorite poses given that it can strengthen and at the same time stretch the body.

### **6.1.4 Get fit**

Although it was not the first aim of participating in yoga classes, those who were attending the classes on a regular base notably expressed that they get fitter in the long term. Nonetheless, dietary habits play an essential role for the informants; for example, one of the informants told me she can avoid junk food more easily by adopting a healthier lifestyle. I received several

different terms regarding this issue such as, “building a good shape”, “keep the body straight”, “being in a good form” and “having a perfect posture” therefore I decided to collect them all under the heading “get fit”.

More than 50% of the interviewees expressed that yoga classes helped them to get fitter by keeping their anatomy in a more straight shape and balance their body. One of the women from the hot yoga classes told me that practicing yoga along with controlling her diet helped her to have more skinny arms which she always wanted.

When it comes to the short questionnaires, none of the men have chosen his goal for going to the yoga classes is to lose weight (for å gå Ned I vekt) but 67% of men wrote in the short questionnaires that they are coming to the yoga classes to come in a good form (å komme I god form). It may be that getting fit for them does not mean to lose weight but maybe to have a toned body or maybe to be mentally in good form. For women in the age group of 18-29, nobody wrote her goal for attending the yoga classes is to lose weight, but 75% wrote they are coming to the yoga classes to come in good form. For women in the age group of 30-44, no one again choose the reason for going to the yoga classes is to lose weight but to come in good form received 76% attention. Of women in the age group of 45-59, only 3%, meaning one person, wrote that she is coming to yoga classes to lose weight, but 57% wrote they are coming to yoga classes to come in good form. Of women plus 60, only one person, 7%, wrote that she is participating in yoga classes to lose weight while 69% believe doing yoga helps them to come in good form.

Vinyasa flow which we practice at the classes is currently one of the most demanding kinds of yogas, especially for those who are interested in getting fit. Those participants with the mindset of getting fitter wish to have more flow with faster movements and sequences and vinyasa. Generally, new beginners describe yoga as a difficult and boring set of exercises. However for regular participants, they reported yoga is something more than a physical exercise. One of the informants expressed yoga brought balance, flexibility, strength, fitness and relaxation to her.

### **6.1.5 Improving Balance and Coordination**

Most of the informants mentioned that when our practices come to balance and coordination, they feel clumsy and weak; therefore they would like to improve and overcome this challenge. I, as an observer of the informants can say, this part of our exercise always seems difficult for the participants, especially when it comes to the coordination of movements. Still the informants reported being helped by these practices, they have found “more control over their body”.

Point of focus in the yoga poses or Drishti “sight, or gazing place” (Jois, 2009, p. 125) is an important part of a pose in an asana and helps to keep the body in a balanced way but none of the informants knew about it or had ever heard of it.

Iyengar (2005, p. 5) says, “it is essential for the follower of the yoga journey to understand the need for integration and balance” and adds “the physical body in other words is not something separate from our mind and soul”. It seems balance in the body and balance of the mind are bound to each other. My informants reported that by practicing yoga they got more comfortable in some tasks such as putting on trousers, tying their shoelaces, and dancing; also consequently experience less ankle twists and acute back pain.

One man with Parkinson disease who happened to attend the yoga classes sometimes told me in a conversation after class that many of the exercises in the yoga class are similar to what his doctor gives him to practice on a daily basis and by attending the classes he is happy to do all these exercises in a group with others.

### **6.1.6 Sleeping Well**

When it comes to sleeping well, I can say it is a challenge for the majority of the informants. Out of eleven interviewees, seven of them mentioned they have experienced struggles with sleeping at least in some period in their life. Informants were well aware that sleeping well has a great impact on their health and they have adopted yoga with the hope of developing the quality of their sleep. They reported that Yin and restorative yoga classes have improved their sleep quality.

Seventy percent of the informants in the interviews expressed that they sleep deeper in the days they have done yoga. According to the Ayurvedic knowledge, the period of time between 22:00 to 02:00 is the best time for sleeping and our body should be in a deep sleep during this time because this period of time belongs to the pitta dosha. (Frawley, 1999, p 30-50). But all the informants in the interviews expressed that family life does not allow them to sleep earlier.

### **6.1.7 Breathing Deep**

Breathing deep was not the goal of any of the informants in attending the classes. Still they mentioned yoga practices assisted them in breathe deeper and helped them to use their diaphragm and the lower part of the lungs for breathing rather than the chest muscles. They believed practice of yoga transformed their inefficient shallow breathing to a deeper breathing. Other than that they explained yoga practices assisted them to be more aware in their everyday life to breathe deeper and be mindful about breathing deep.

## 7 Mental health

The definition Patanjali offers at the beginning of *Yoga Sutras* addressing mental health is “yogas citta-vritti-nirodhah” means “yoga is the restriction of the movement of the mind” (Philosophy of yoga, 2018, p. 77).

The reports from informants from the interviews indicate yoga practices make their mind calmer, in ease and acceptance.

Iyengar explains, “as one penetrates the inner body more deeply, one’s mind becomes immersed in the asana” (Iyengar, 2005 p. 24).

Informants reported that Savasana (lie down on the mat with arms and legs apart) pose at the end of the yoga classes bring a deeper rest and relaxation to them and generally it is one of the most popular poses which the informants all admitted they love at the end of the classes; it brings them much joy.

Yoga is an accepted practice by families and society in Norway which is an important factor contributing to its growth; none of the informants had any restrictions from the family in relation to attending the classes, and all the informants mentioned that classes are easily accessible for them at a low cost.

Regarding the short questionnaires, 67% of the men wrote mental health is their goal for participating in yoga classes. Women in the age group 18-29, with 85%, have the highest demand for mental health. Of women 30-44, eighty percent wrote their reason for practicing yoga is to have mental health. Of women 45-59, sixty percent wrote their goal for attending the yoga classes is to receive mental health while women plus 60 also have 60% choosing mental health as their goal for attending yoga classes.

I start mental health with happiness but still I will discuss joy and happiness from other aspects in the spiritual part as well. I will continue the findings with mind relaxation, stress relief, peace and inner ease, being positive and being patient. Other feedback I received is as follows: Feeling in harmony with themselves and with the members of their families, meaning and value, inspiration, calm, mood balance, self-confidence, acceptance, nonjudgmental mind, being more

forgiving, self-connection, strengthening inner being, emotional health, hope, purpose, peace, being positive, internal comfort.

## **7.1 Happiness**

Iyengar states that an important benefit of doing yoga is the happiness it brings to life (Iyengar, 2005 p. 26).

Most of my informants believed practicing yoga on a regular base has made their life happier. After the yoga classes, they feel good. It is important to also mention that they feel happier with themselves, an acceptance toward themselves and others.

Jois (1997) asserts “if we practice the science of yoga, which is useful to the entire human community and which yields happiness both here and hereafter, if we practice it without fail, we will then attain physical, mental, and spiritual happiness, and our minds will flood toward the self”. (1997, p. 177).

I received this feedback from the informants of interviews that by practicing yoga they can let go of negative thoughts and emotions and consequently they get happier, especially at the end of the yoga classes they feel good. In the short questionnaires, 50% of the men wrote that attending yoga classes makes them happier. Women 18-29 wrote (62%) that they get happier by practicing yoga. Women 30-44, with the lowest percentage of 16%, wrote that their goal for attending the yoga classes is to get happier. Women 45-59 wrote (43%) that they get happier by practicing yoga. Of women plus 60, twenty seven percent wrote their goal for attending the yoga classes is to get happier.

## **7.2 Keep the mind relaxed**

Keeping the mind and nervous system relaxed is equally one of the most important results which is motivating the informants to attend yoga classes. However, some of the informants claimed they rarely face a critical stressful situation in a week, yet still cooling down the nervous system is a factor encouraging them to come to yoga classes. In this case, almost all the informants

mentioned in comparison to the other sorts of exercises like running, dancing, spinning and weight lifting, yoga is more effective to keep their mind and nervous system relaxed. Child pose, forward bend, downward facing dog and savasana are extremely helpful poses for them in reaching this goal, according to what they reported. Iyengar explains:

This process of relaxing the brain is achieved through asana. We generally think of mind as being in our head. In asana our consciousness spreads throughout the body, eventually diffusing in every cell, creating a complete awareness. In this way stressful thought is drained away, and our mind focuses on the body, intelligence, and awareness as a whole (Iyengar, 2005, p. 14-15).

Generally, it happens in everyday of my work that the participants at the end of the classes do not want to sit up from the Shavasana pose and still they want to remain in that pose because they feel relaxed. One of the informants of the interviews explained that yoga classes, especially the last part, helps her to let go of all the complaints and negative thoughts and leads her to a more relaxed mind.

I explained already that 100% of the men in the short questionnaires come to the yoga classes to get relaxed, but 50% of them wrote they are coming to the yoga classes to explore their mind (å utforske mitt sinn); and 17% of men wrote they come to the yoga classes to become emotionally intelligent. As Iyengar explained earlier, our mind and body could be in a close relationship to each other therefore I tried to analyze these three items together, (å bli avslappet), explore my mind (å utforske mitt sinn) and emotional intelligence (hjelp meg til å bli mer følelsesmessig bevisst). Mental health received a high demands in both interviews and questionnaires but details of the mental health, like exploration of the mind and awareness about emotions, received less attention in both interviews and questionnaires. Women 18-29 wrote (62%) that they attend the classes to get relaxed while 25% wrote they are coming to the yoga classes to explore their mind or to become emotionally aware. In the same manner, in the short questionnaires, 92% of the women 30-44 wrote that their reason for attending yoga classes is to get relaxed but 12% attend the yoga classes to explore their mind and 32% come to yoga classes for the reason of getting emotionally aware. Seventy percent of women 45-59 also wrote they are coming to yoga classes to get relaxed while 15% of them come to the classes to explore their mind, and the aim for 30%



of them is to get emotionally aware. Women plus 60 state they come to the classes to get relaxed (80%), while the goal of 26% is to explore their mind, and 33% come to get emotionally aware.

### **7.3 Stress Relief**

The informants explained that yoga helps them to control their desires, especially when it comes to eating habits for maintaining a healthy diet and avoiding junk food. They added that this lifts a lot of stress from their shoulders with the consequence that they can have a longer and healthier life and hopefully more natural beauty.

Most of the members mentioned that breathing exercises are effective and helpful for them to keep their mind cool and stress free. My observations show age has a great impact upon the breathing exercises or meditation practices in the yoga class. Younger participants under the age of approximately 30 can barely sit for a few minutes for breathing exercises during the class while the age group of over 45 look more comfortable with this part of the class.

I have received this feedback many times from the participants of the yoga classes and also the interviewees attending yoga classes at least once a week find it has a great impact on their calmness in order to relieve their stress. It helps them to integrate with different conditions and experience more harmony in their life. Looking at the short questionnaires, 50% of men wrote their reason for attending the yoga classes is to receive harmony, 37% of women 18-29 wrote that they receive harmony by attending yoga classes, 72% of women 30-44 wrote that their reason for attending the yoga classes is to receive harmony, 70% of women 45-59 attend yoga classes to receive harmony and of women plus 60, 69% wrote that they are looking to receive harmony from attending yoga classes.

### **7.4 Peace and inner ease**

Most of my informants called the yoga class calming and refreshing, it brings them an inner peace and ease, brings them a moment to restore their energy and prepare themselves mentally

for what is waiting for them in the future and, it brings them a chance to digest mentally what has happened to them in the past.

Here there is a conflict between the informants; some of them believe a series of fast and heavy asanas make them feel more relaxed and connected at the end of the sessions and the other group asserts that a series of light and easy asanas are more effective in bringing ease and peace to their mind. It looks like the younger participants need faster flow of movements while the elders prefer less physically demanding activities.

However, these feelings may also change during the weeks and days based on their mood or other physical activities and workouts they may have done.

For example, one of the informants in the age group of plus 60 in the interviews explained she feels integrated and peaceful at the end of the classes by an easy yoga practice followed by 10 minutes shavasana or meditation while one of the younger informants in the age group of 18-29 expressed in the interviews that she likes more active and heavier exercises at the yoga classes to mentally get more at ease, but still some days she just likes very easy and light exercise at the yoga class depending on how her level of energy is.

When it comes to the short questionnaires, 17% of the men that wrote by attending yoga classes they get emotionally aware and in a same way 17% wrote that they get integrated by attending the classes. Twenty-five percent of women 18-29 wrote they get emotionally aware by practicing yoga while no one chose integration as their reason for attending yoga classes. Of women 30-44, 32% of them wrote that they get more emotionally aware by practicing yoga and 20% get integrated. Of women 45-59%, 30% get emotionally aware by practicing yoga and 10% get integrated by doing yoga. Of women plus 60, 33% get emotionally aware by doing yoga while no one gets integrated by practicing yoga.

## **7.5 Being positive**

Most of the informants reported that yoga can help them to be more positive in their everyday life and it had a big effect on both their body and their mind; to be healthier in body and potentially eliminate negative thoughts from the mind. They explained yoga helps them to have a

better attitude towards situations and also towards other people, as one of my informants said, yoga brings a chance to individuals to change their attitude by practicing rather than reading or learning philosophical texts. To feel gratitude and be grateful for what they have. “Health begins with firmness in body, deepens to emotional stability, then leads to intellectual clarity, wisdom, and finally the unveiling of the soul” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 23). The short questionnaires show that yoga is helpful for 83% of the men to get more positive, the same for 50% of women 18-29 and 64% of women 30-44. For women 45-59, it is 33% and 40% for women plus 60.

## **7.6 Being patient**

Most of the participants who are attending the yoga classes on a regular basis (at least once a week) admitted the slow movements of positions make them more patient in their everyday life. Most of those who are practicing Yin classes reported initially they got frustrated by holding the poses for a long time of two to four minutes, and even experienced anger maintaining the asana and observing the flow of air from their nose deep into their lungs. Initially the pain in their muscles didn't let them concentrate on breathing but by the time the level of pain and frustration decrease, it slowly appears that they can remain in poses and be comfortable with their own body and mind in a single pose; and that this is also applicable to real life situations, as some of the informants expressed. Iyengar (2005, p. 48) asserts “to master an asana, you need patience and discipline. The asana will not come by making faces. So how does one learn to make pain bearable? One must create relaxation even as there is the right amount of tension”.

## 8 Spiritual health

Iyengar explains, “the aim of yoga is to discover our immortal self. The practice of yoga teaches us to live fully—physically and spiritually” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 5). He adds in other pages that the path of yoga which has been introduced by Patanjali can lead us from flexibility to divinity and it is not only about the physical exercises or asanas, but it means the whole eight limbs of yoga (Iyengar, 2005, p. 27). In the interviews and from the findings of my research I understood yoga is more than just a physical exercise for my informants, but still as most of them mentioned yoga is not a religious practice for them but it is a lifestyle to improve their health, happiness and increase harmony. Iyengar also explains yoga that has the capacity to lead us from flexibility to divinity and maybe I could add that harmony and happiness also has a place in the wide spectrum from flexibility to divinity.

Flood also explains, the “eight limbs of yoga introduced by Patañjali leads individuals to the realization of the self as brahman” (2019, p. 155).

Indeed this part was the most difficult part of my work. I was going to measure something that different individuals have a variety of ideas about it. Even several of the informants directly told me that they don't know what spirituality is and how they can identify it from the mundane aspects of life, to report and share it with me. Therefore I needed to detect each and every word and code they used in our conversations in order to go behind the scenes and encode their words and thoughts to see where are they in the spiritual spectrum. Nonetheless, I have to mention here at the beginning, in such a field like yoga, most of the concepts are intertwined with each other and the separation of the sacred from the mundane is not easy and functional.

In this part of the research, I will try to represent the simple ideas and experiences of participants according to the spiritual codes and concepts. I started my work by reading and finding the codes, more specifically spiritual codes in the path of yoga that one may find within different texts, from Samkhya to Gita and Sutras, and more recent literatures such as tantra and Hatha Yoga Pradipika. I decided to start with Yama and Niyama, the first and second limbs of Ashtanga Yoga, because it is offered by Patañjali in the Sutras and it includes most of the ethical principles in the path of yoga. My task was to comparatively analyse our conversation and the

lifestyle of the informants and detect the sign of ethical codes and spiritual integration within their everyday life, to see how the informants argue and define these codes within their lifestyle. *Light on Life* by B.K.S Iyengar (2005), *Yoga Mala* by Sri K.Pattabhi Jois (2002) and *Guide to Human Conduct* by Anandmurti (2006) were extremely helpful for me in understanding the ethical codes of yoga and observing them in the lifestyle of the informants.

## **Yama and Niyama**

Mallinson and Singleton explain about Yama and Niyama:

Their best-known schema occurs in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra, which teaches five ethical rules (non-violence (ahimsā), truthfulness (satya), not stealing (asteya), sexual continence (brahmacharya) and non-acquisitiveness (aparigraha) and five observances (cleanliness (śauca), contentment (saṃtoṣa), austerity (tapas), recitation of sacred texts (svādhyāya) and devotion to the Lord (īśvarapraṇidhāna) as the first two components of its eightfold yoga (aṣṭāṅgayoga). These rules and observances are in fact much older than the Pātañjalayogaśāstra itself, their forerunners being much in evidence in, for example, the Mahābhārata (2.6.1), as well as the earliest surviving Jain text, the Ācārāṅga Sūtra (c. 350 BCE) (2017, p. 50).

Iyengar further explains that “the yoga journey begins with the five universal moral commandments (yama). The journey continues with five steps of self purification (niyama)”. He also adds that “these ethical precepts are always with us from the beginning to the end of the yoga journey, for the demonstration of one’s spiritual realization lies in none other than how one walks among and interacts with one’s fellow human beings” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 10).

Anandamurti starts his book, *Guide to Human Conduct*, with the explanation that morality is the basis for spiritual practice. He explains that spiritual practice needs mental harmony and this mental harmony may be called morality also, nonetheless in different places of his book, he mentions that morality is not the goal, to not commit a crime is not the goal of morality but it is a starting point for practicing spirituality (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 3-5).

In my research, I am going to incorporate the spiritual codes of Yama and Niyamas along with the explanation and clarification of Jois, Iyengar and Ananddamurti, and share the findings of my research where there is an idea or issue that is observable.

## **8.1 Yama**

Mallinson and Singleton explain the ethical codes of Yama are as follow, Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha. I will explain these five ethical codes in the following pages one by one and compare them with my observations along my research project.

Generally, yogis are supposed to renounce their family life and hold the vow of celibacy for the rest of their life and stay away from mankind and society in order to attain liberation. However, there are some examples of yogis in history who had a family life while practicing yoga (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 52).

### **8.1.1 Ahimsa**

Jois explains, “Ahimsa means not causing injury to anyone, including animals, in any form, at any time, or for any reason, in word, thought, or deed” (Jois, 2002, p. 144).

How could I know whether the informants that I am dealing with are violent or not? Should I ask them: are you violent? Do you injure others?

Anandamurti (2006) explains, regarding eatable items, there are two important things to follow:

First, as far as possible, articles of food must be selected from among those items in which development of consciousness is comparatively little; i.e., if vegetables are available, animals should not be slaughtered. Secondly, under all circumstances before killing any animal having developed or underdeveloped consciousness, it must be considered whether it is possible to live in a healthy body without taking such lives (2006, p.10).

Here was a good place to start. I talked a lot with the informants about food, diet and its effect on physical and spiritual health, but I have to explain here that none of the informants were vegetarian or tried a vegetarian or vegan diet for a long period of time. However, there is a

tendency among them to consume smaller animals, like chicken and fish, and maybe even some days of the week try to remain vegetarian. Anandamurti (2006) adds, “The nature of your living cells will be formed in accordance with the type of food you take”. He explains that by consuming meat, we allow meanness in our body and mind: “if the cells of the human body grow on rotten and bad-smelling food, or on the fresh flesh of animals in which mean tendencies predominate, it is but natural that the mind will have a tendency of meanness” (2006, p. 14). He continues to explain, “in some cases we are allowed to adjust with the availabilities nature offers but it should not be directed by greed and selfishness” (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 15).

To observe violence in the level of thought was difficult, if not impossible, but in the realm of action, especially diet and food habits, it was easy to search and detect. I discussed it with the informants and was therefore aware of the details of their food habits. But the reports and observations show that none of the informants were fulfilling Ahimsa. Indeed none of the interviewees were vegetarian or vegan. In the short questionnaires that I distributed, 10% of the men are vegetarian. Of women 18-29, 19% are vegetarian. Women ages 30-44 have 4.5% vegetarian. Women 45-59 had 2.2% vegetarian and similarly, of women plus 60, also 2.2% are vegetarian. Of participants with more than one year experience of practicing yoga, 3.7% are vegetarian and 3.1% of participants with less than one year yoga practice are vegetarian. According to the short questionnaires, the younger practitioners have more of a tendency to be vegetarian and respectively it may not have anything to do with yoga practice but they may just do it for their own health or for their respect for animals. However, still according to the short questionnaires, long term yoga practitioners have slightly more tendency to be vegetarian.

### **8.1.2 Satya**

Jois explains, “Satya is truthfulness. One should always tell the truth in thought, word, and deed. The truth must be pleasant to others; an unpleasant truth should not be uttered” (Jois, 2002, p. 144-145). Iyengar asserts, “Yoga is one, whether you are doing triangle pose (Trikonasana) or telling the truth.” (Iyengar, 2005, p. 250).

Anandamurti (2006, p. 20) explains, “satya implies proper action of mind and the right use of words with the spirit of welfare”. He has emphasized that truthfulness increases the welfare of the society. (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 20-21).

In my interviews, I could not find a tangible way to measure and understand the level of truthfulness of the participants. I am still unsure how to encode this principle.

### **8.1.3 Asteya**

Jois explains, “Asteya means not stealing the property or possessions of others. Being envious of or begrudging another; cheating someone with sweet words; gaining selfish ends under the guise of truthfulness: all are to be abandoned.” (Jois, 2002, p. 145).

Anandamurti (2006, p. 23-25) mentioned in his book “not to take possession what belongs to others is asteya”; he explains four types of theft as follow: “Physical theft of any material object, psychic theft, depriving others of their due physically, depriving others of their due mentally”. I could not ask or observe these four aspects. Still I found a further explanation by Anandamurti, “helping the society by paying donation or taxes is beneficial for cleaning the mind from greediness and achieving Astey”. And here I can say, as far as I know, all my informants were paying their due taxes and from Anandamurti’s perspective I could assert that paying due taxes and helping to elevate society financially can be even a spiritual practice.

### **8.1.4 Brahmacharya**

Jois explains, “brahmacharya is not possible by means of the mere retention of vital fluid. Becoming one with the supreme Brahman alone is brahmacharya” (2002, p. 146). Here Jois is giving some observable ideas, “he (yogi) must avoid mixing with vulgar people; going to crowded areas for recreation; reading vulgar books; going to theaters and restaurants; and conversing secretly with strangers of the opposite sex.” (2002,p. 146). Jois describes, “if these are avoided, brahmacharya can be preserved in part. For it is by brahmacharya alone that we are



able to achieve impossible tasks: to live longer; to conquer death; and, above all, to know the true self.” (2002, p. 147). He also mentioned a physical achievement “live longer”. Jois adds:

For Iyengar, brahmacharya is more the matter of ethical control, he explains:

To most people, brahmacharya simply means that if you want to be a spiritual person then you should be permanently celibate. However, since it would presumably be a good thing if the whole world wanted to become spiritual, we would soon have a planet populated only by dogs and cats and cows. Brahmacharya implies self-containment, the ability to control oneself, either in respect to others or to experience wholeness in asana. It is not abstinence from sexual activity. It is the ethical control of a powerful natural force. The degree of control will depend on the degree of evolution of the practitioner. Continence and constancy are the key concepts, and let us not forget that the root of celibacy in Latin means being unmarried; it does not imply immorality (Iyengar, 2005, p. 254).

Mallinson and Singleton explain:

In most yoga texts the ideal yogi is an ascetic who has forgone possessions, family and domestic life in order to devote himself to yogic practice. In these renunciant yoga traditions celibacy is held to be an essential prerequisite for yoga practice, as is finding isolated dwelling places away from human society. For ascetic yogis, the goal of liberation can be achieved only by renouncing society. Nevertheless, despite there being few historical accounts of households practising yoga, some texts indicate that their yoga may also be undertaken by non-renouncers (Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, p. 51).

Anandamurti explains “the correct meaning of brahmacharya is to remain attached to Brahma” and further says “many misinterpret brahmacharya to mean preservation of semen. It should be remembered that neither the word Brahma nor the word carya has any relevance to the word semen”, and regarding this issue adds “the prevention of the discharge of semen by some special measures or prevention of its surplus formation by fasting is ordinarily termed as so-called Brahmacharya” and continue “a suppression of the sexual desire results in other desires, especially anger, taking a more terrible form” (2006, p. 27-28). Anandamurti asserts:

Marriage is a natural function like bath, food, sleep, etc. Therefore, there is nothing to be condemned in it, nor does it go against dharma. When a great man or an elevated sádharma

is not prohibited from taking food, etc., there is no reason why he or she should be debarred from marriage. But proper control is no doubt greatly needed, not only over food and sleep, but in every walk of life. The lack of such control causes disease. Food is essential for life, but absence of control over eating causes indigestion. A bath is refreshing, but in the absence of control over bath, i.e., a long-continued bath, would make one catch cold. Similarly, marriage has its function but the absence of restraint in married life would cause various diseases in body and mind (2006, p. 30-31).

In some lines later, he writes “the practice of brahmacharya is held in higher esteem than the other four items of yama” and finally he introduced something which was fascinating for me: “a way to always remain happy and spiritual, to renounce desire from the result of the action.” (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 32).

Devotion was my key; brahmacharya does not simply means to renounce life and live inside a cave, but means to renounce the desire and result of the action, do the action for Brahma and leave the result, not be attached to the result, thus the idea of devotion was the code. Indeed none of the participants were familiar with the concept of devotion in different aspects of their life, from their job to their yoga and other areas of their lifestyle, but happiness still was there and they believed practicing yoga has made their life happier.

### **8.1.5 Aparigraha**

Jois explains, “only taking as much food as we need to maintain our bodies, and not desiring things of enjoyment which are superfluous to the physical body, is aparigraha.” (Jois, 2002, p. 155).

Anandamurti (2006, p 34) defines Aparigraha as, “in case of enjoyment of any material object, the control over the subjectivity is called Brahmacharya while the control over objectivity is aparigraha”; and in other lines adds, “non-indulgence in the enjoyment of such amenities and comforts of life as are superfluous for the preservation of life is aparigraha” (2006, p. 34). Indeed all my informants had a good life and good job; still I was unsure how to measure if they are greedy or not, but the next lines from Anandamurti helped me to conclude that every person has

their own level of Aparigraha and it could be different for a variety of individuals, especially in a rich country like Norway where people may be more wealthy. Anandamurti explains:

a number of factors have to be taken into consideration to determine an individual's necessity for the preservation of life. It may be that the requirements of any two persons are not similar. It is therefore, difficult to determine the minimum requirements for any particular person, because it is entirely a relative factor. The minimum requirement of a person can, to some extent, be determined and decided by the society. (2006, p. 34).

However, observing and deciding whether someone has established himself in non-possessiveness and non-greediness was not an easy task to find it out in a one hour interview. Nonetheless, later lines from Anandamurti were helpful for me to look at aparigraha from other angle, because I was trying to analyze the individuals to find their level of possessiveness or non-possessiveness, however in this case we could look at society as a whole, not only the individuals, to find the level of aparigraha. "An endless fight to reduce one's own objects of comforts out of sympathy for the common people, after ensuring that individuals are able to maintain solidarity in their physical, mental and spiritual lives for themselves and their families" (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 36). In my understanding, I found the society positive and helpful, as I could observe they always help minorities and especially refugees in their countries, which according to my knowledge, is the application of aparigraha.

## **8.2 Niyama**

Jois explains Niyama as, "the second step, which has five sub-limbs: shaucha; santosha; tapas; swadhyaya; and ishvarapranidhana" (2002, p. 156).

Iyengar (2005, p. 261) explains, "it is the practice of the yamas, niyamas, and six other petals of yoga that make possible the penetration from the skin to the soul".

Anandamurti further explains, "Yama Sádhaná is the practice of the physical and psychic strata while the Niyama Sádhaná carries equal weight in mundane, supramundane and spiritual strata" (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 41).

### 8.2.1 Shaoca

Jois (2002) explains shaoca means purification and there are two kinds of purification, external and internal. External purification is concerned with the cleaning of the body, while he explains internal purification means “viewing everything and every being as a friend, and treating all with affection. This means engaging the mind with the supreme feeling that all are our friends, and considering everything to be a reflection of God” (Jois, 2002, p. 157-158).

Iyengar explains:

This ability to harmonize with the immediate environment is a big payoff. From cleansing ourselves we have the contentment that comes from functioning in a smooth way with our environment and not being disturbed by its inevitable challenges and disturbances. (Iyengar, 2005, p. 259).

Anandamurti (2006, p. 42) divides Shaoca into two parts and explains, “it means purity or cleanliness. It can be subdivided into two parts, one relating to external sphere, i.e., external cleanliness, and the other to mental sphere, internal cleanliness.” Anandamurti adds, “the proper use of soap, water or other cleansers to keep the body, clothes or surroundings clean is external cleanliness”. More he explains:

Just as one’s clothes and houses get dirty very quickly in a dust storm, so also the mind becomes much more polluted by the storm of even insignificant passion in much less time. Therefore, it is a necessity to maintain the cleanliness of body, dress and house, but the need to keep the mind clean is still greater. Cleansing the mind is a far more laborious job than cleansing the body, clothes, house, etc. (Anandamurti 2006, p. 43).

These later lines helped me to observe and understand more about this concept.

The feeling of selflessness, the feeling of universalism is the only remedy to remove mental impurities. People who have fascination or temptation for any material object, can gradually remove that mental pollution arising out of selfish [motives] by adopting just the reverse course. Those who are very greedy for money should form the habit of charity, and they can serve humanity through such a practice. Those who are angry or

egoistic should cultivate the habit of being polite, and they should serve humanity through that practice. (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 44).

With all these ideas, I decided to first see the bodily application of Shaoca. I was always observing the informants, their clothes, their yoga mat, their hair and nails, how clean and tidy they are, even how they fold their blankets after yoga sessions. Externally, everything was fine and nice. The next step was the cleanliness of the internal body, or maybe the more modern word is detoxification, how much they maintain cleanliness in their internal organs. One of the best ways yoga traditions introduced for the maintenance of internal cleaning is fasting, to stop eating or if possible, drinking for a period of time. But none of the informants ever tried it before. The other step was to not allow any toxin inside the body. The majority of informants consume alcohol, a variety of cold drinks, ice creams and other processed food which may contain toxins and cause internal impurities and sicknesses. Another step was to perform devotional activities or serving others and doing regular meditation. None of the informants was engaged in a regular devotional act of serving others, but they were doing meditation weekly at least with me for two three minutes per session, and some of them told me they do meditation at home also some days a week.

### **8.2.2 Santosa**

Jois explains, “keeping the mind focused in a single direction, always being happy, and never feeling regret for any reason, this is the contentment known as santosha. If santosha is practiced, unsurpassed joy comes” (Jois, 2002, p. 158).

Iyengar (2005, p. 262) asserts, “santosa, in the yogic sense of lasting and stable harmony, is encountered through the practice of pranayama, which conquers in its turn the active (rajasic) nature of the mind and makes possible a practice that is both zealous and sustained”.

Anandamurti (2006, p. 48) explains, “tośa means the state of mental ease. Santośa, therefore, means a state of proper ease. Contentment is not at all possible if the individual is running after carnal pleasures like a beast” and adds:

Santosa sádhaná lies in being contented with the earnings of normal labour, without any undue pressure on the body and mind. To remain contented, one has to make a special type of mental effort to keep aloof from external allurements. It is called the art of being eternally happy, as you are content with what you have regardless of circumstances. (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 49).

The state of happiness, joy and harmony is what I heard frequently from the informants and in observation and even in the questionnaires. Some of the yoga participants experience it already and some of them are looking forward to having it in their life. All the informants expressed they feel harmony, ease and peace or joy after the yoga classes, but no one knows why. I also do not have a clear explanation about it, and there could be a whole chain of reasons for it, from dietary habits to ethical codes and asana and pranayama practices.

### **8.2.3 Tapah**

Jois explains, “tapas means observances performed to discipline the body and sense organs”. Jois continues, “food regulation in accordance with the lunar cycles, which discipline the body in accordance with the scriptures, is the greatest of all the tapas. By means of them, impurities are destroyed, mind becomes purified, and the body and sense organs are perfected” (Jois, 2002, p. 159).

Iyengar explains:

The third niyama, tapas, sustained practice, corresponds to pratyahara, the hinge between the outer and inner aspects of yoga practice. It implies that cognitive awareness is bent inward with a view to self knowledge (svadhyaya). It directs one toward the core of being and, like the blacksmith’s bellows, it must always continue to heat the heart of the fire of practice, otherwise the alchemical transformation through extreme heat will never take place. The fire will burn merrily, but it will not turn lead into gold (2005, p. 262-263).

Anandamurti (2006, p. 51) explains:

Tapah means to practice penance to reach the goal. To practice shaoca it is not necessary to undergo physical discomfort to serve humanity. A donation of ten rupees brings no physical discomfort for millionaires. It is, therefore, not tapah for them but this gift helps them in practicing mental shaoca. There must be one and only one purpose behind the practice of penance and that is to shoulder the sorrows and miseries of others to make them happy, to free them from grief and to give them comfort. Tapah means to undergo hardship for promoting the welfare of the society. If you serve sick people who are in great pain for hours together to give them needed relief, this is tapah.

Serving others and devotional activities have received a lot of attention on this path, with little manifestation at least among those who were participating as my informants, therefore I should say the practice of tapah was not observable in their lifestyle from my point of view.

#### **8.2.4 Svadhyaya**

Jois explains, “swadhyaya is the recital of Vedic verses and prayers in accordance with strict rules of recitation” (Jois, 2002, p. 159).

Iyengar describes:

The fourth niyama, svadhyaya or self-knowledge, is difficult. We so much associate knowledge with the acquisition of learning (vidya). In reality, svadhyaya, whether through study or self-analysis, is the path of concentration (dharana), leading up a cruel and stony path to knowledge and to disrobing of the false or pretentious self with all its flaws and bogus virtues. Its reward is the path of wisdom, (jnana marga), which so denudes us of self-illusion that we are ready for the next great step (Iyengar, 2005, p. 263).

Anandamurti (2006, p. 56) explains it as “the clear understanding of any spiritual subject” and continues, “Svādhyāya means not only to read or hear a subject, but also to understand its significance, the underlying idea”. I had already asked this question in my interviews. Are there any books, movies, speeches or courses connected to yoga that you have tried recently or earlier? In this case, all the informants have either read some text regarding yoga recently or

watched some videos on social media, as they expressed. I don't know how clearly they understood the spiritual subject through their self-analysis and contemplation, as Anandamurti describes, but it is clear that they engaged themselves in addition to practicing yoga in learning about it, and it may give them spiritual elevation.

### **8.2.5 Ishvara pranidhana**

Jois adds, “Ishwarapranidhana, or surrender to God, means carrying out all our actions, spoken or unspoken, without desiring their fruit, and offering their fruit to the Lord” (Jois, 2002, p. 161).

Iyengar, (2005, p. 263-264) explains:

This is surrender to God (Ishvara pranidhana), often equated with bhakti, the yoga of supreme devotion and selflessness. Surrender to God is possible only for one who has, perhaps by circumstance or adversity or humiliation, discarded ego. For the surrender to be lasting, meditation in its highest sense must be accomplished.

In the passage where Anandamurti discusses Ishvara pranidhana (2006, p. 59-61), he asserts, “there may be many interpretations of the term Ishvara. But it commonly means, the controller of this universe. He who controls the thought-waves of this universe is Ishvara”, and adds “prañidhāna means to understand clearly or to adopt something as a shelter. Therefore, Ishvara prañidhāna means to establish oneself in the Cosmic idea”, and in other places it says “Ishvara prañidhāna means to move with accelerated speed towards that Supreme Shelter, God”. To the question of how to do it, he explains, “first the mind will have to be withdrawn from the limited ‘I’ feeling, and focused at a point. Then one will take the thought of the Macrocosm around that point with the help of the ideation of the mantra prescribed according to one’s own sañskāra”. None of all these ideas have been practiced by the participants of my project until now, and they did not know what Ishvara is. In later lines, under the explanation of Ishvara pranidhana, Anandamurti moves to point out the importance of mantra or japa and its varieties, “japa is of three kinds, vacanika or loud voice, upanshu or in a low tone and manacika or mental japa”, while he states, “mental japa is the best process of Ishvara prañidhāna”. And, of course, none of



my informants had any idea about practicing it. He goes on and explains in later lines to point out some of the manifestations of spiritual experiences.

When the mental flow of a spiritual aspirant moves along the introversial phase of Macrocosmic meditation, one's animative force, having the potentiality of divinity itself, rises above all tendencies — all *sañskáras* — and proceeds towards Eternal bliss. In this state the mind is vibrated with Cosmic feeling. The unexpressed divine qualities of the higher glands find expression and the resonance of the mind vibrates the nervous system. This gives rise to pious expressions in the physical body. In the case of those people whose occult feelings are not physically expressed due to causes associated with the nerves, the mental vibrations cause certain radical changes, in the various glands within the body. These occult feelings are basically of eight types: *stambha* (astounding), *kampa* (trembling), *sveda* (sweating), *svarabheda* (hoarseness of voice), *ashru* (tears), *romáñca* (horripilation), *vaevarña* (change of colour) and *pralaya* (fainting fit). There are other feelings associated with these major feelings. For examples, *nrtya* (dancing), *giita* (singing), *viluñthana* (rolling), *kroshana* (weeping), *huffkára* (roaring), *lálásráva* (salivating), *jmbhaña* (yawning), *lokápekśá tyága* (indifference), *átáhásya* (bursting into laughter), *ghúrñana* (whirling), *hikká* (hiccoughing), *tanumoána* (relaxation of the physical body) and *diirghashvása* (deep breathing) (Anandamurti, 2006, p. 62-63).

It is true that I observe several of these feelings in my informants and other practitioners, especially at the end of the classes. This could mean they are touching the spiritual realm which makes them feel good, happy, relaxed, harmonious, peaceful, joyful and all the feelings associated with pleasure; even tears are all natural and not from pain. If we follow the spiritual health from the beginning of the text, we see that none of the informants are totally fulfilling the formal steps and the ethical codes in the way the scriptures and spiritual leaders explained; however there are still results, although the structure may be different. A traditional yogin steps to the path of yoga to attain moksha, stop suffering and get out of the cycle of birth, death and rebirth; although among my informants they mostly acquired better health, a calm mind and peaceful feelings along this path. In the modern life people initiate the path of yoga to improve their health and

elevate the quality of their life, however they may also experience tranquility and joy along the way.

## 9 Questionnaires

I distributed 100 copies of a short questionnaire consisting of six questions among the members who were participating in yoga classes at SATS. In this chapter, I present the survey findings quantitatively. The full questionnaire is on the appendix C of this thesis. I distributed these questionnaires in order to build up a clearer overview of what is going on in the background of my research, and to see the mindset of other members beyond the small circle of the eleven informants, how they look at yoga and what their priorities are.

### 9.1 Gender

Among the SATS members who responded to the questionnaires 91 are women, 7 are men and two people did not return the questionnaires to me. I used Canva application to make the charts, and in the following pages I show the findings visually.

### 9.2 Ages

	18-29 years	30-44 years	45-59 years	60 plus	Totals
Women	8	33	31	19	91
Men	0	3	4	0	7

Of the 98 members who answered the questionnaires, both genders, 8 people are between 18-29 years old, 36 members are between 30-44 years old, 35 are between 45-59 years old and 19 are 60 plus. Among the men, 3 of them are in an age group between 30-44 years old and 4 of them between 45-59 years old.

Women in total were 91, with eight of them in the age group 18-29, thirty-three in the age group of 30-44, thirty between 45-59 and nineteen are plus 60 years old.

### 9.3 Education

The next question was regarding the education of the participants, with respect to their gender and age group. I offer only one age group for men (30-59), because their numbers were less, only seven people. In all cases, I will start with men first, then women 18-29, then women 30-44, and then women 45-59, and finally women over 60.

#### Men

	Men 30-59	Women 18-29	Women 30-44	Women 45-59	Women +60
High school	1	1	4	4	1
College 4 years	1	5	12	11	6
4 years plus	5	2	15	14	10
Other			2	2	2
Totals	7	8	33	31	19

Education of men in age group of 30-59 years old.

One men, high school.

One men, college with 4 years.

Five men, more than 4 years.

#### Women between 18-29 years old

One woman, high school.

Five women, college of 4 years.

Two women, more than 4 years.

#### women between 30-44 years old

Two women, other.

Four women, high school.

Twelve women, college with 4 years.

Fifteen women, more than 4 years.

### **women between 45-59 years old**

Two women, other.

Four women, high school.

Eleven women, college with 4 years.

Fourteen women, more than 4 years.

### **women plus 60 years old**

Two women, other.

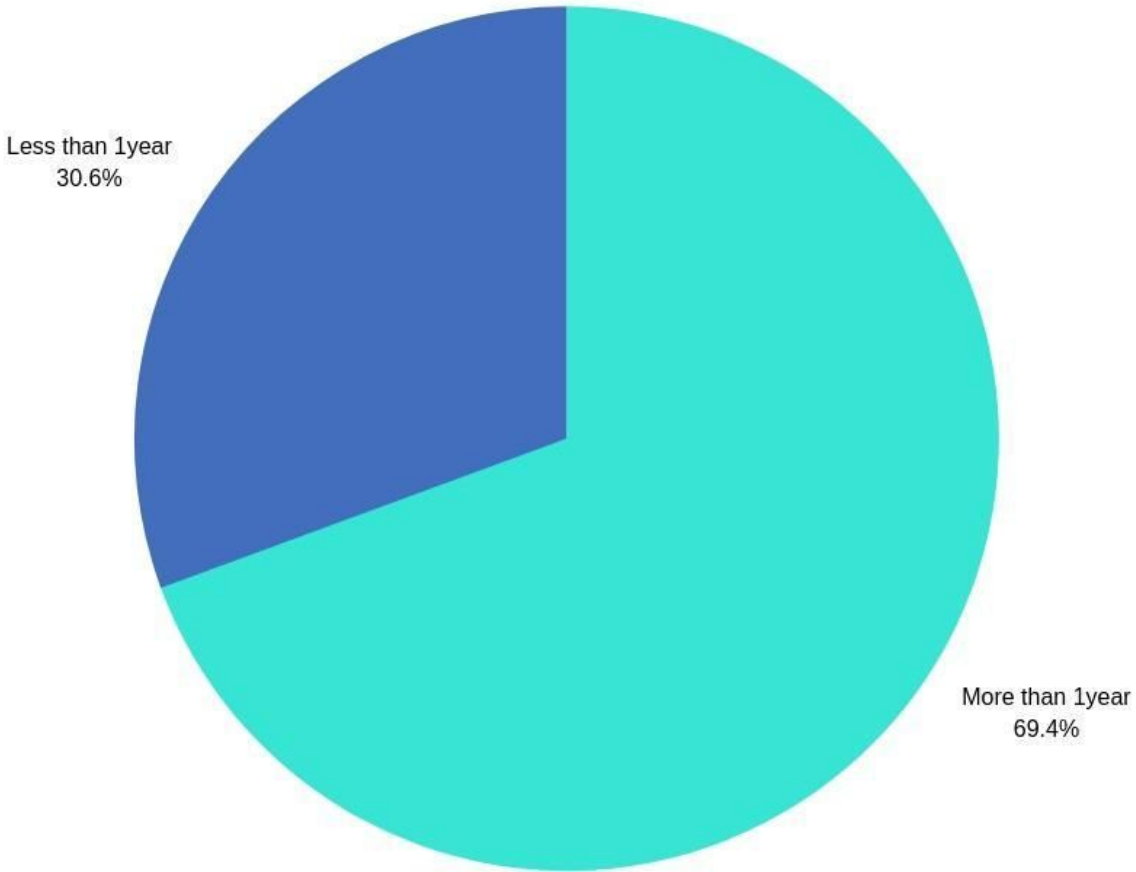
One woman, high school.

Six women, college with 4 years.

Ten women, more than 4 years.

## **9.4 Duration of yoga practice**

Among the 98 people who responded to the questionnaires, 68 of them have been practicing yoga for more than one year and 30 of them less than one year.



### 9.5 Reason for attending yoga classes

Next is the response of members to the question below.

Hvorfor går du på yogaklassene og hva ønsker du å oppnå med dette?  
 (Why are you going to the yoga classes and what do you wish to achieve from it?)

Det er bare fysisk trening for meg (that is just physical training for me)

Det er noe mer enn rutinemessig trening  
 (That is something more than a just regular exercise)

Det er åndelig for meg  
 (That is spirituality for me)

Jeg skal delta for å lære yoga  
 (I participate to learn yoga)

For å få energi

(To receive energy)

Det avhenger av instruktøren  
(It depends on the instructor)

Jeg føler at jeg tilhører en spesiell gruppe mennesker  
(I feel that I belong to a special group of people)

For å oppnå harmoni  
(To achieve harmony)

For mental helse  
(For mental health)

Hjelpe meg til å bli mer følelsesmessig bevisst  
(It helps me to become emotionally more  
intelligent)

Det er som en religion for meg  
(It is a religion for me)

Å komme i god form  
(To become in good form)

For å gå ned i vekt  
(To lose weight)

Å bli mer positiv  
(To become more positive)

Å utforske mitt sinn  
(To explore my mind)

Å bli avslappet  
(To become relaxed)

For å forbedre helsen min  
(To improve my health)

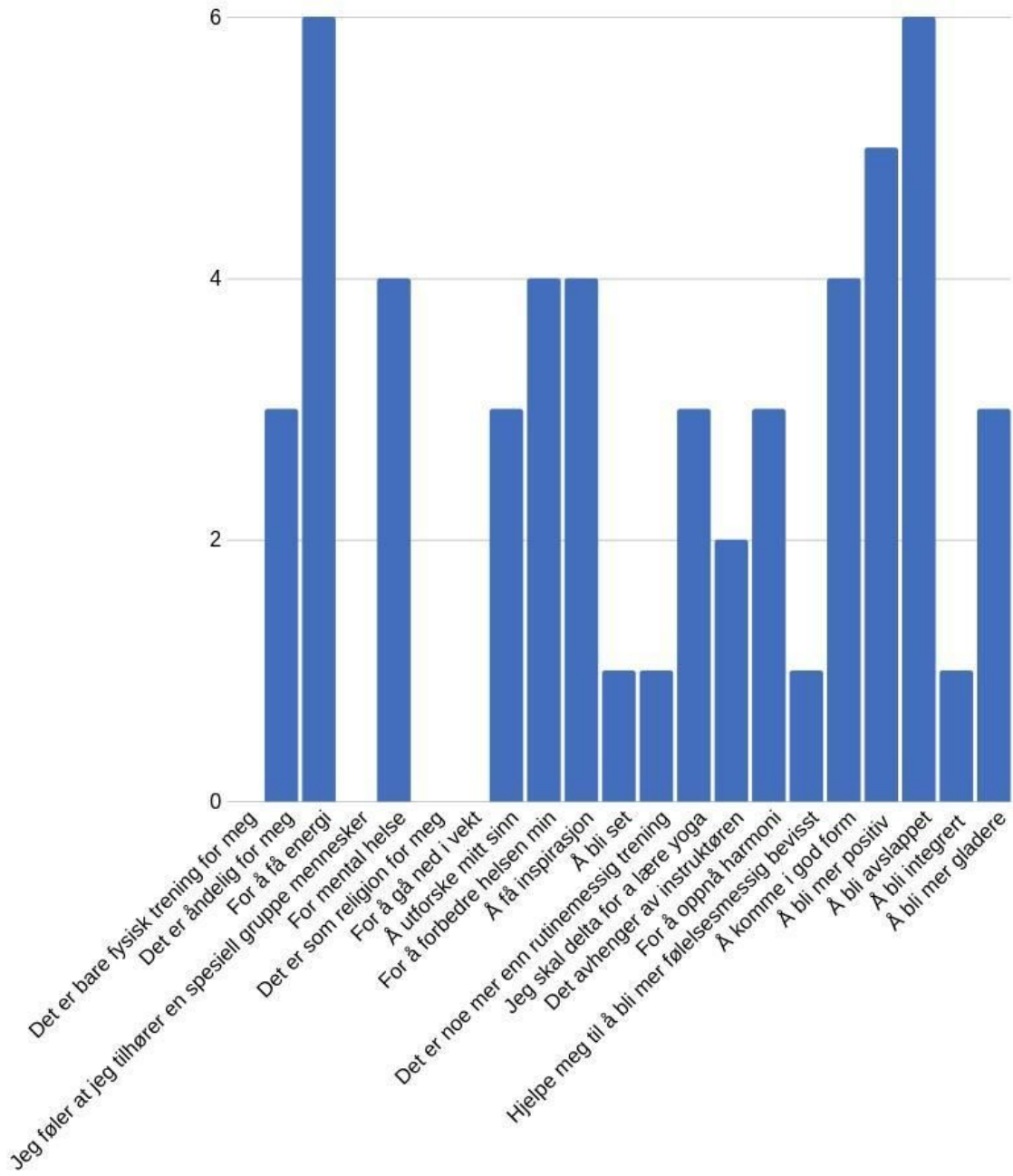
Å bli integrert  
(To integrate)

Å få inspirasjon  
(To receive inspiration)

Å bli mer gladere  
(To become more happy)

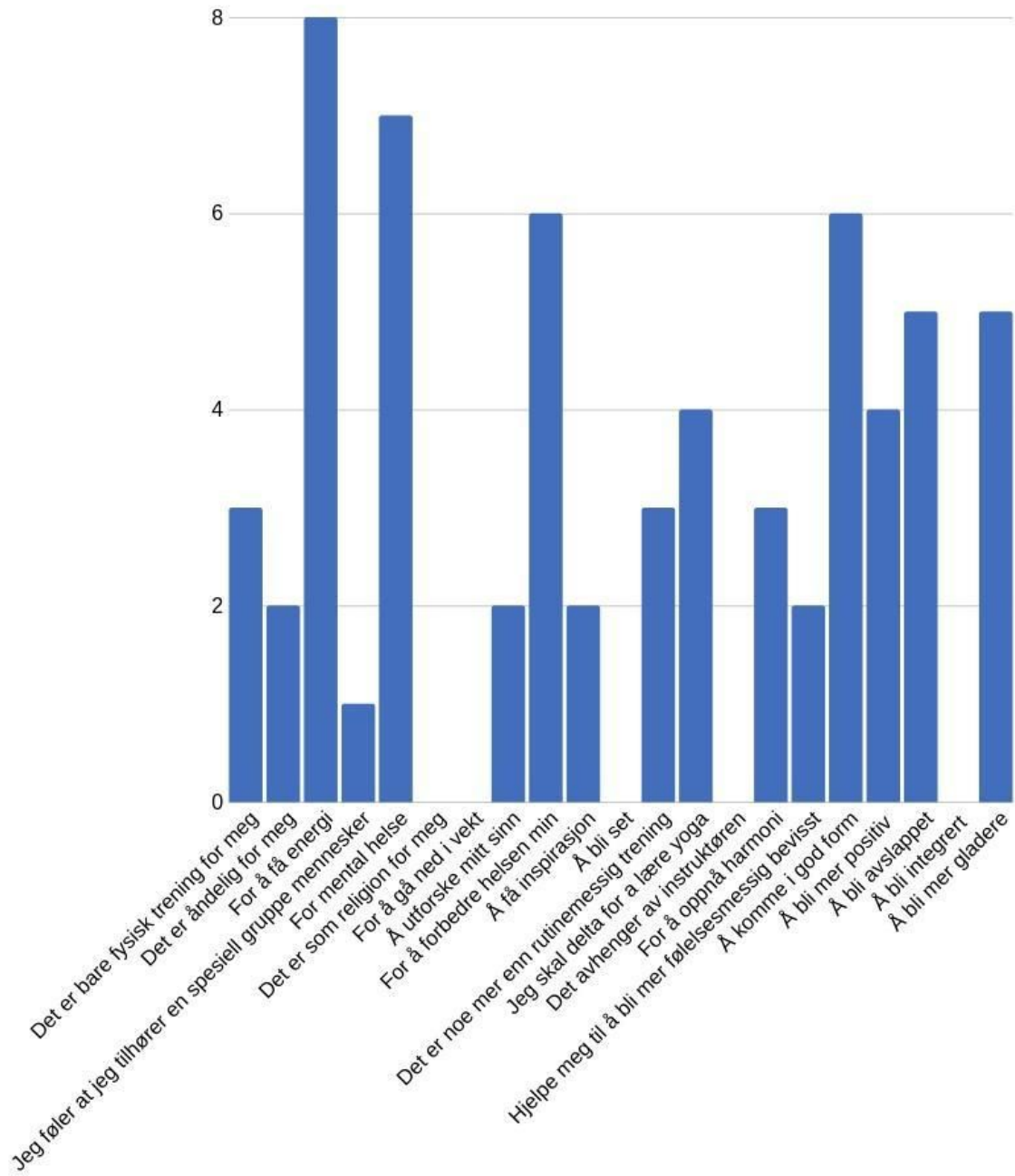
Å bli sett  
(To be seen)

Men

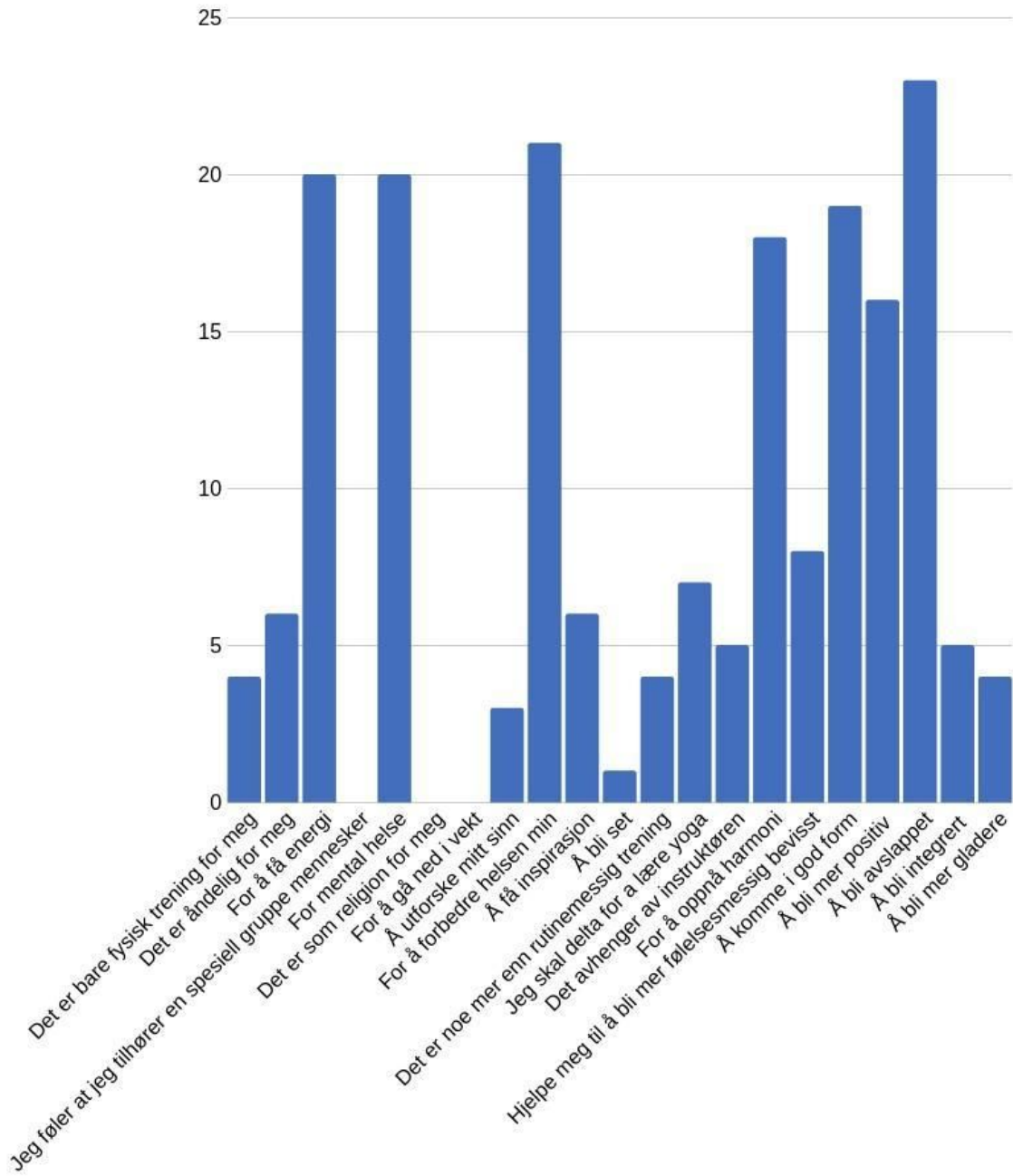




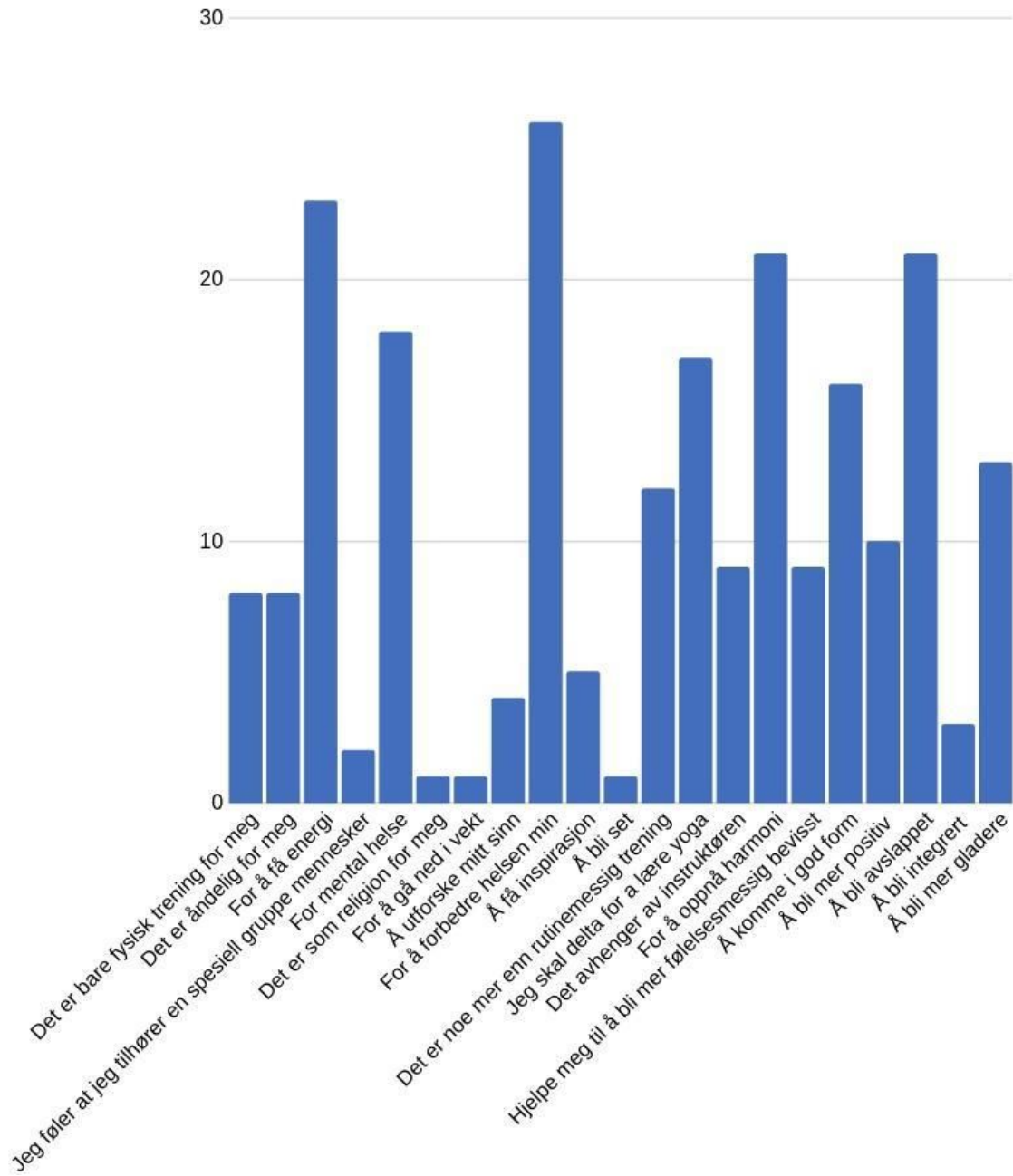
Women 18-29



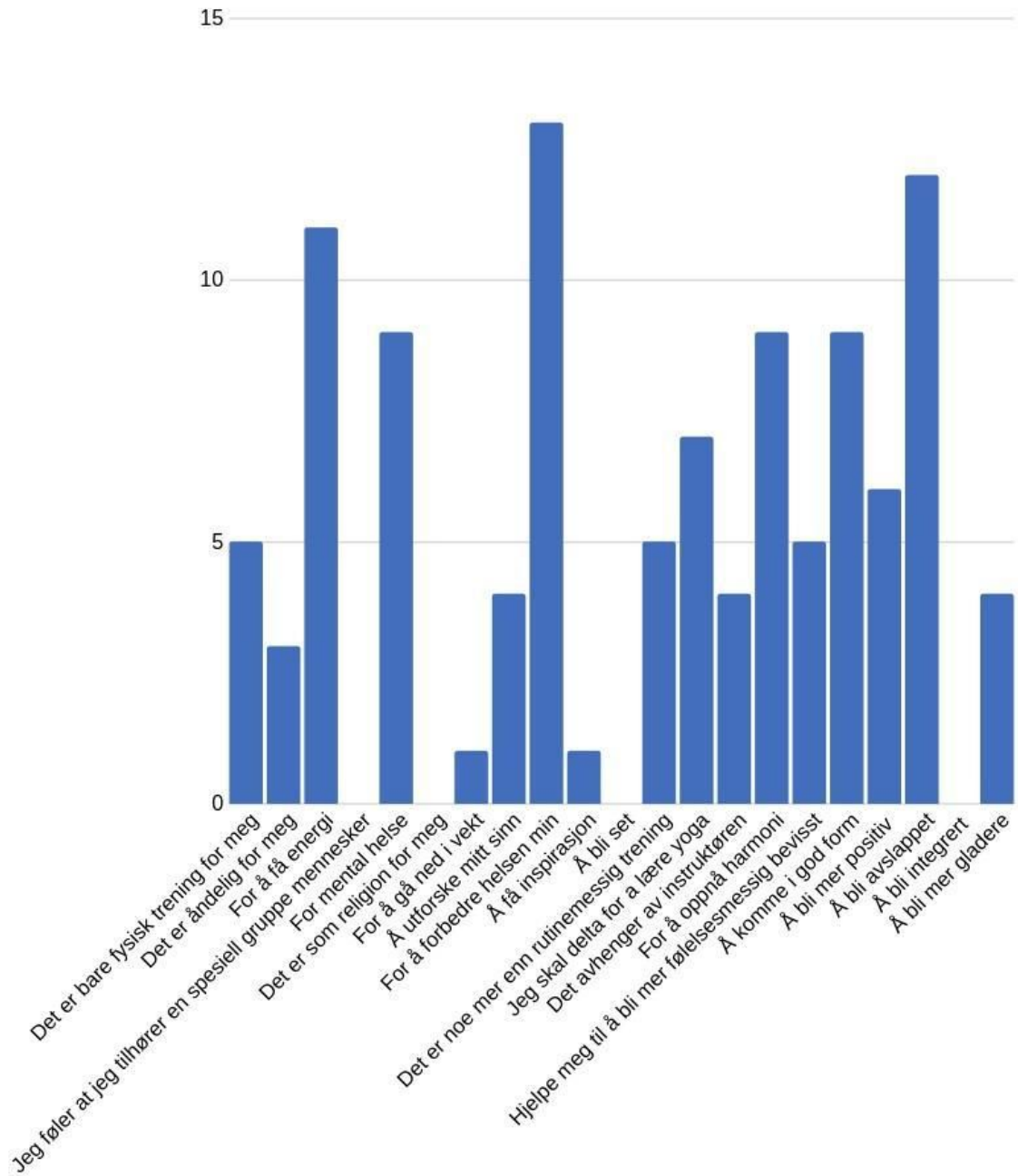
Women 30-44



Women 45-59

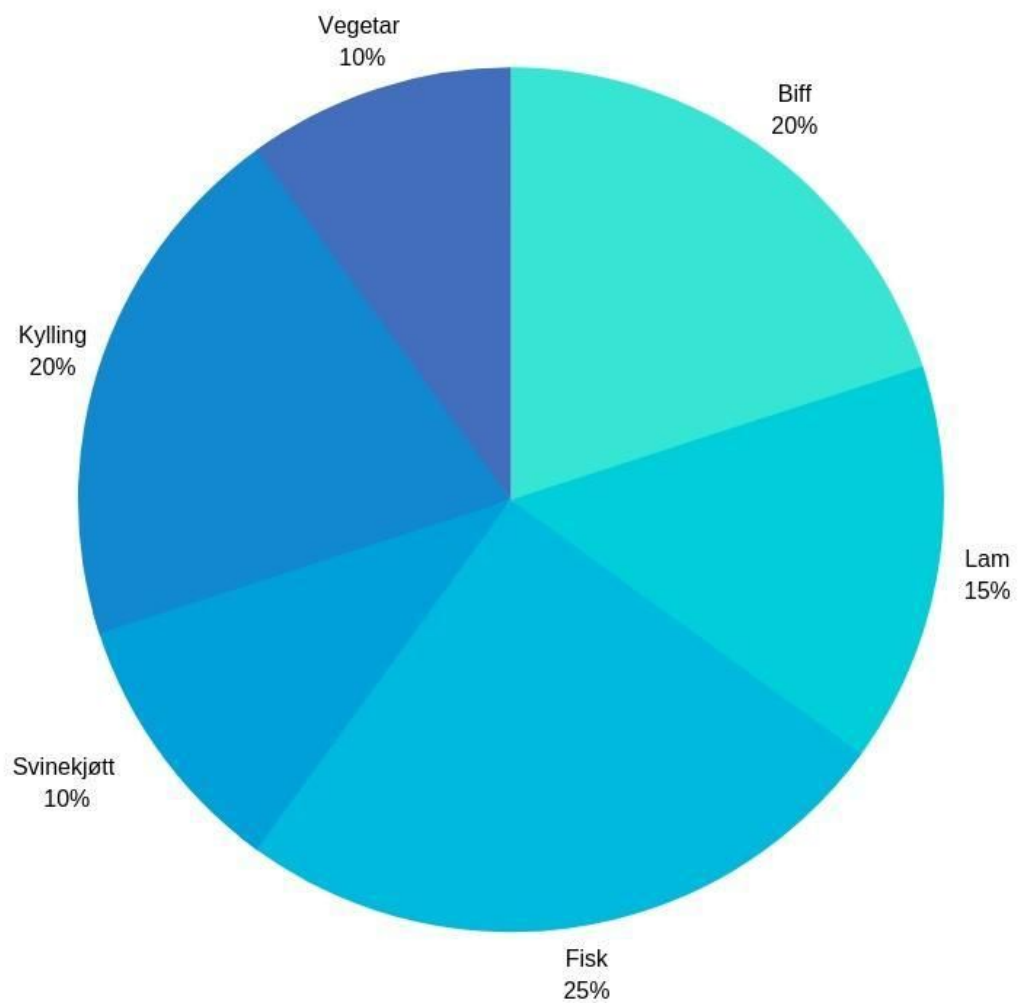


## Women plus 60

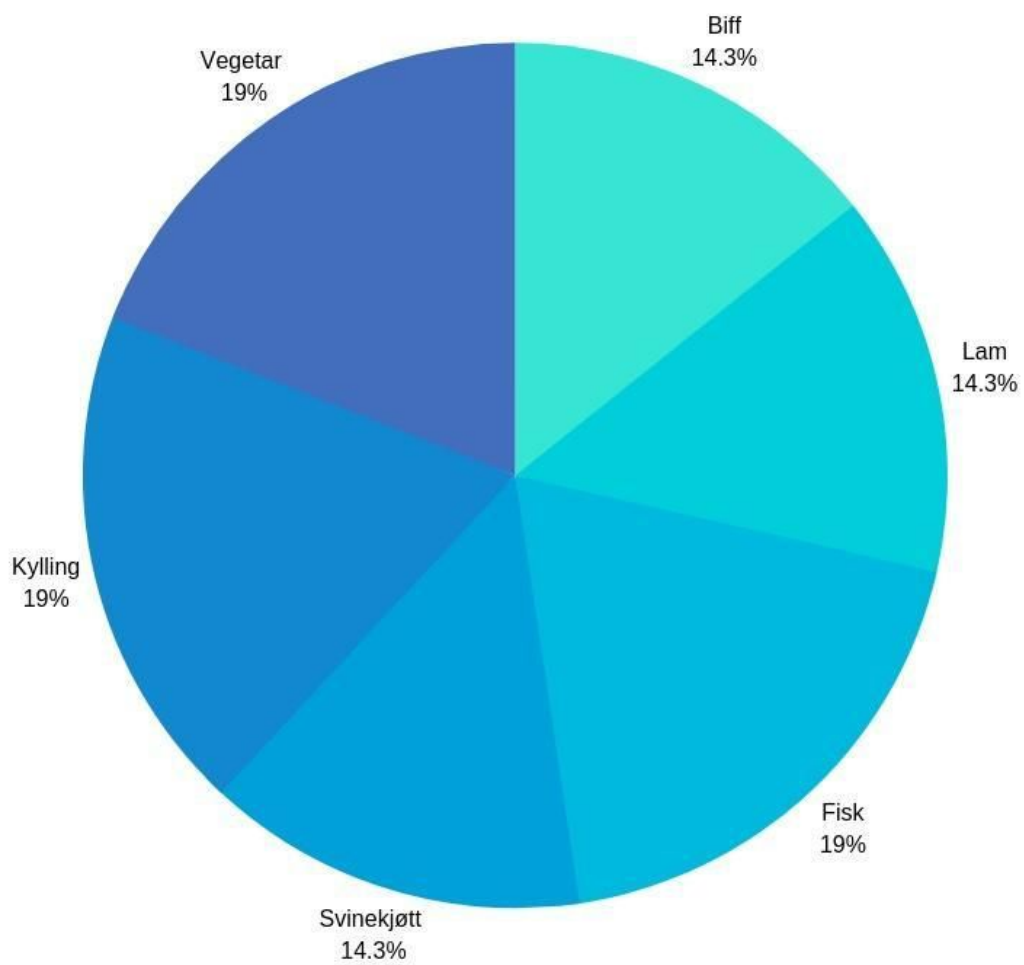


## 9.6 Food habits

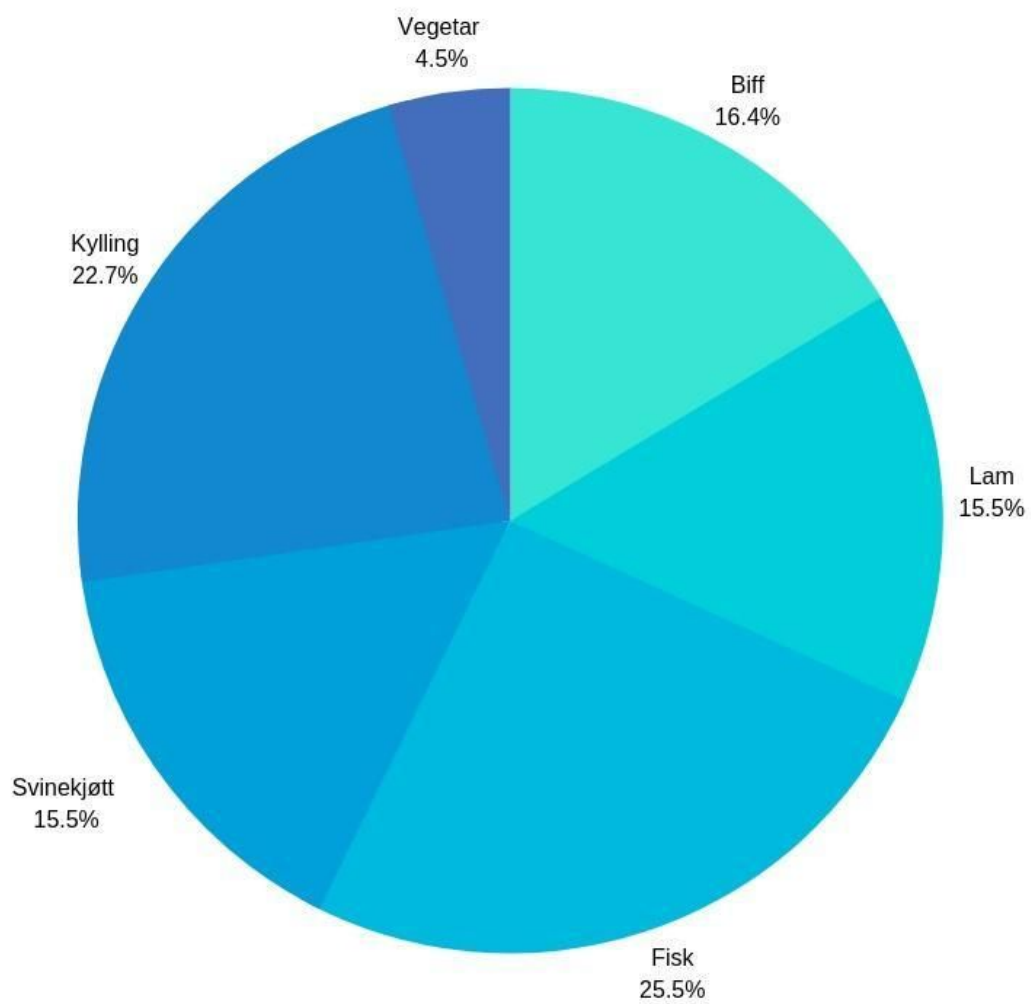
The last question was regarding the food habits of the participants, beginning with the men.



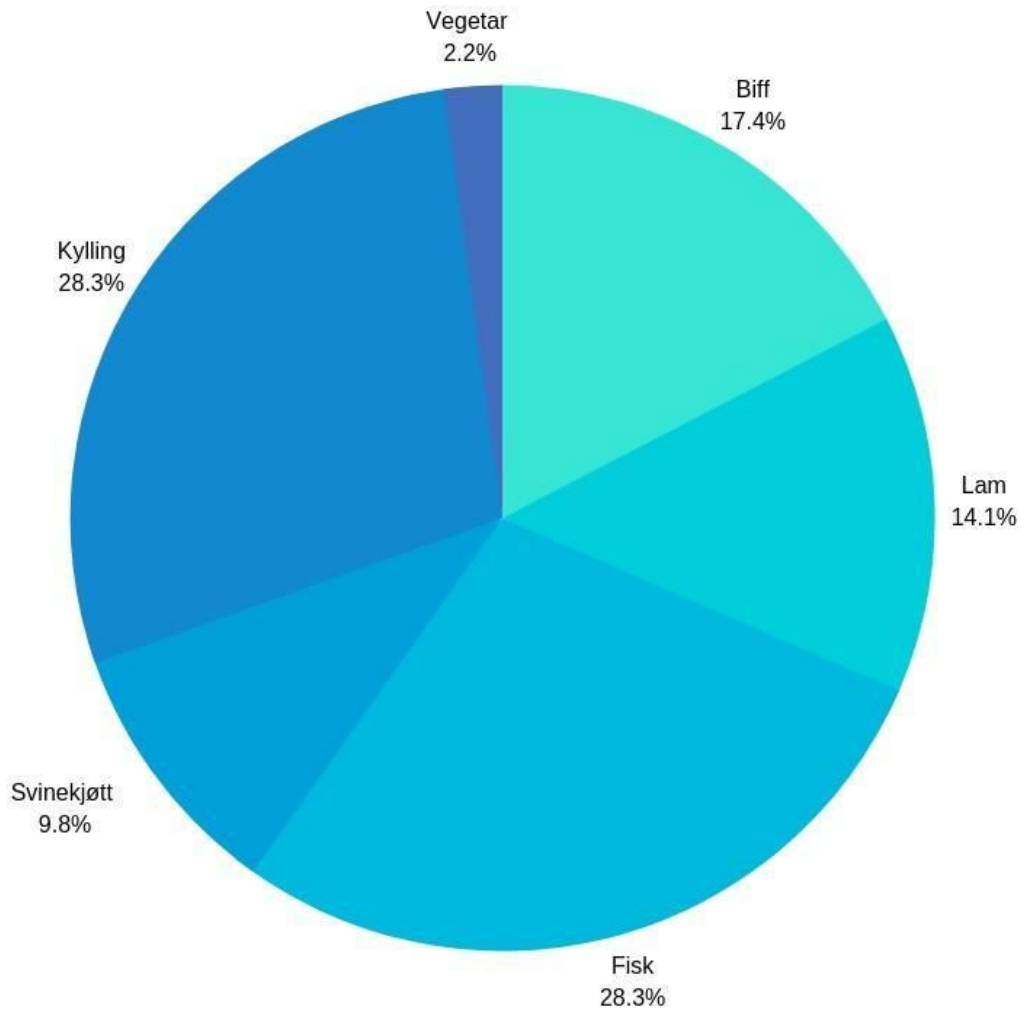
Women 18-29



Women 30-44

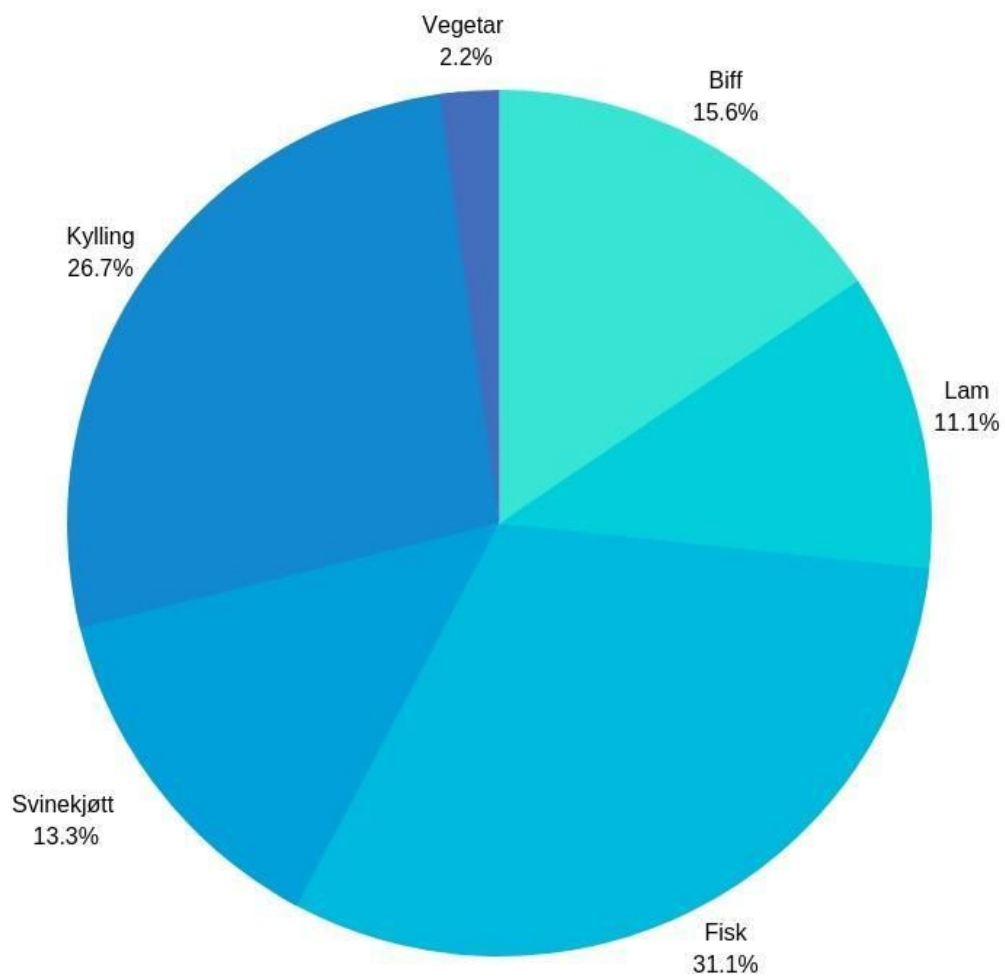


Women 45-59

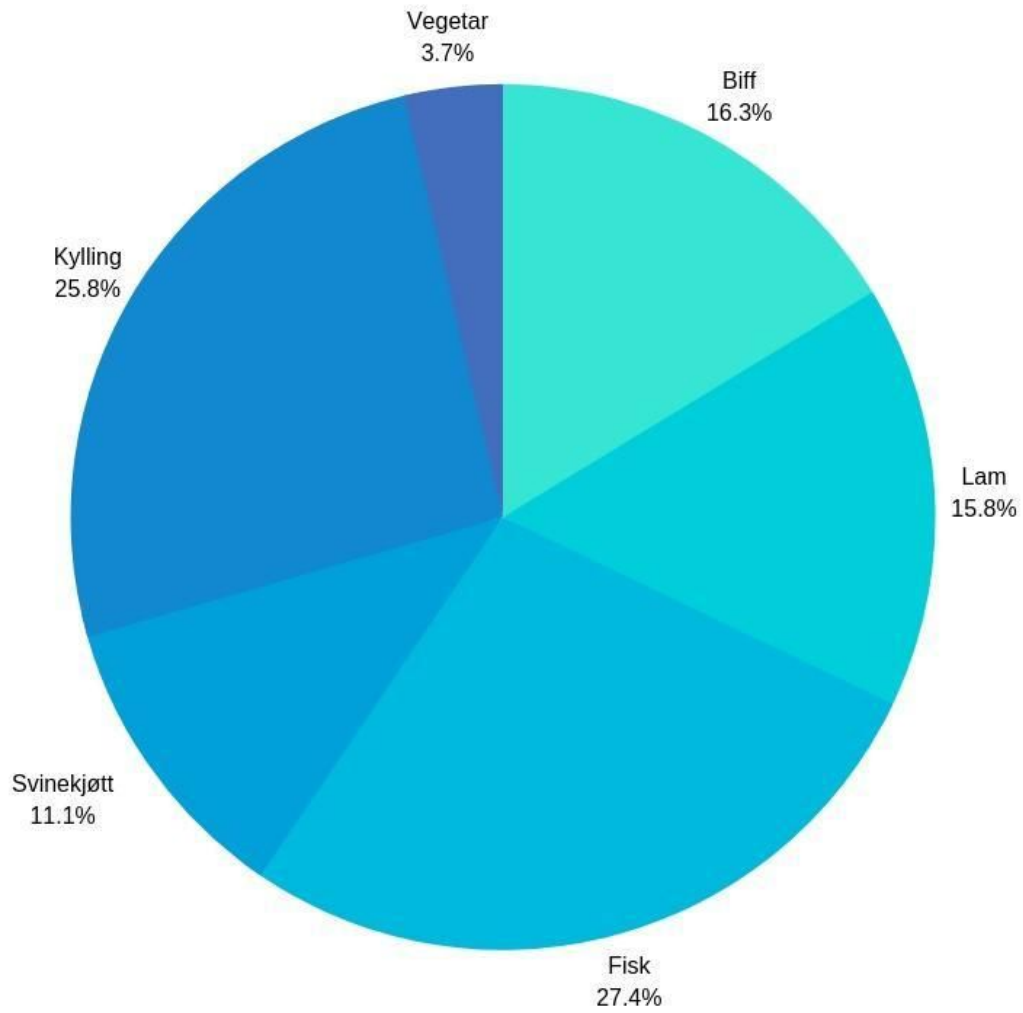




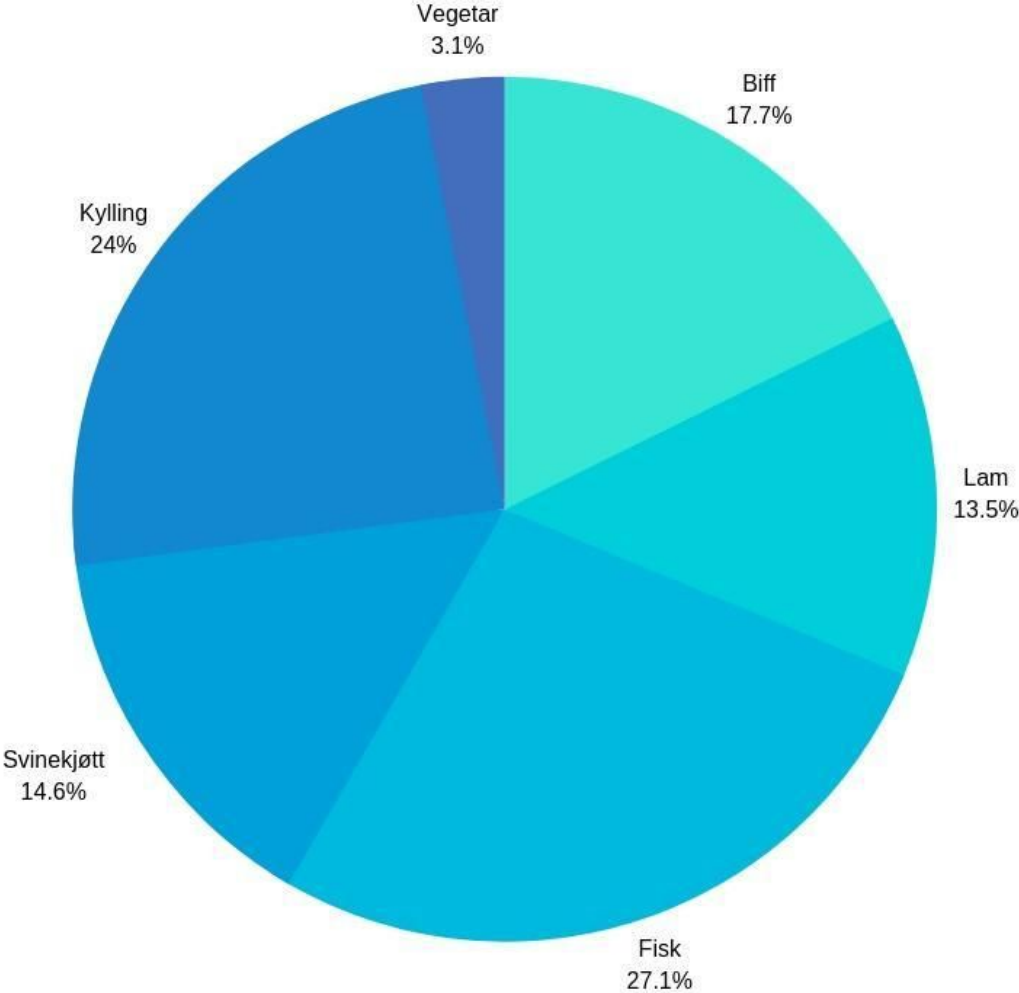
## Women plus 60



The chart below shows the food habits of the yoga participants with more than one year experience.



The chart below shows the chosen diet for participants with less than one year yoga attendance.



## Conclusion

Study of scriptures shows that the tradition of yoga in pre-historic time at the Indus valley was created to help individuals escape the suffering of life and the cycle of rebirth and help them to unite with their eternal god (Brahma). From then until now, a variety of changes and philosophical interventions have occurred in this tradition. Until approximately hundred years ago, despite all the shifts in this tradition, two things never changed: first yoga remained mostly only in the Indian subcontinent; second, this tradition was always practiced along with religious and spiritual themes. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century until now, with the attempt of different Indian spiritual leaders such as Vivekananda and Yogananda along with the intercultural and globalized movements, yoga is flourishing around the world. Today this tradition is practicing in almost every country and has become a multi-billion dollar industry. People from different races and different religious backgrounds are consumers of this tradition with a variety of aims and goals; for most of them, the practice of yoga is no longer a religious act. With this understanding, I started to work as a yoga instructor in Norway. I had recently arrived in Norway when I was first employed by SATS to teach yoga. I mainly learned yoga in India, in different cities – from Bihar and Varanasi to Rishikesh and the Iyengar center of yoga in Pune. I had never been in a western country and it was interesting for me to learn what yoga is for Norwegians. So studying at VID Specialized University in Stavanger gave me a chance to conduct research on this subject. I choose qualitative research and later on I added short questionnaires among one hundred practitioners of yoga at SATS. My main research question was to understand what yoga is for Norwegians. Is it sport or spirituality? Additionally, I was reading the main sources and scripture of yoga to understand what is original yoga and to what degree the practice of my informants are relevant or irrelevant to it. I had many interesting findings, but I did my best to keep my focus on the research question as well as attempting to follow the ethical rules and remain faithful to the informants. However, teaching yoga was ongoing work and I was an employee of SATS, therefore I tried to not let the environment and my personal ideas reflect on this research project.

I represented my findings in three chapters of observations, interviews and questionnaires but I used the data and findings in other places in this thesis relatively when needed. In the observation part, I tried to give a background of SATS and what is going on in that environment. The interview part is divided into three parts of physical health, mental health and spiritual health, but in this part I offer findings from the short questionnaires as well to give a better understanding in that chapter.

All of the interviewees in this project were Norwegian women with higher education. They have participated in yoga classes at SATS for more than one year and some of them even for several years. They believe regular yoga exercises should be in their routine weekly practices. They mostly combine yoga with other exercises such as running, dance, cycling and so on. They claimed this combination of yoga exercises with other sports brings more health to them and during the week they feel less stress and tension in their body and their mind. They seem to adopt yoga in their everyday life, according to their own personal background and belief. It seems like they have consciously or unconsciously assimilated or limited the links to the philosophical and religious traditions of India. Health receives a high status and attention from them. Most of the informants mentioned their family life doesn't allow them to spend more time and energy to adopt and integrate a yogic lifestyle and practice yoga outside the mat. It was noticeable for me that most of the informants had a very flexible religious background that was allowing them to be free without any mental or social pressures. It means, however, I did not observe any strong bound between their regular practice of yoga and Hindu tradition, and I did not receive any signal or idea from the informants that would relate them to other religions of the world either. It seemed they have excluded the pressure of being religious from their lives.

My research showed yoga, other than being a type of sport or spirituality, is a way to improve the health of my informants, to create more happiness, escape from stress and achieve more harmony in everyday lifestyle. By reading different texts, I understood it is not the first time people using a religious ritual or act for the benefit of their mundane life; for example, recently we see some individuals are fasting and stop eating or drinking for a period of time, which is mainly a religious practice, for the secular reason of losing weight.

There are different stands regarding the use of religion for the betterment of the mundane side of life. Some spiritual leaders and philosophers call it misuse and corruption of religious exercise, like Swami Vivekananda and Weber and Muller. But Gavin Flood, in his recent book *RELIGION AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE* (2019, p. 66), explains that religion, spirituality and the sacred is here to improve our lives, to improve our health and this is the purpose of religion, to shape a better society and elevate different aspects of health, such as mental, physical and spiritual health – because health is sacred. However, none of the interviewees claimed yoga is a religious act for them and even the spiritual side was treated with hesitation. Regarding the questionnaires, out of one hundred questionnaires, no one chosen yoga as a religious exercise for them, and only three people out of one hundred chose the feeling of belonging to a special group of people, while the choices of health improvement, receiving energy, becoming positive, gaining harmony, becoming more relaxed received lots of attention. Maybe I could argue that yoga is functioning as a religion behind the scenes, because it improves different aspects of health and health is sacred, however this claim is made with hesitation as there seemed little sense of belonging behind this regular act.

On the other hand, there is a fact that modern yoga introduced itself as a science rather than a religion, a science that brings physical and mental health to the practitioners – and secular societies might pay more attention to the science and functionality rather than revelation. Modern yoga in Western countries is more functional than religious, and maybe it is this functionality of yoga which has increased its popularity. “Here we need to be aware of the fact that in Indian religion functionality is generally given greater priority than canonicity” (*Philosophy of yoga*, 2018, p. 190).

Hence any question about the authenticity of modern yoga teachings is based on outside suppositions that really have little relevance for the yoga tradition itself. Modern practitioners of yoga are not for the most part primarily concerned with achieving liberation from rebirth and they may not even believe in the ideas of Samkhya or Advaita Vedanta. Rather they are seeking improvement in bodily wellbeing or an escape from stress and mental difficulties. It would be wrong, however, to suppose that such practitioners are therefore not doing yoga properly. As with Hinduism as a whole, yoga

offers a range of benefits some of which are purely spiritual and some of which are entirely related to living well in this world (Philosophy of yoga, 2018, p. 190).

Singleton explains: “the term yoga as it refers to modern postural practice is a homonym, and not a synonym, of the ‘yoga’ associated with the philosophical system of Patañjali” (2010, p.15). Indeed most of my informants didn’t know even who is Patañjali, but still I believe there are many links between modern and classical yoga of Patañjali. However, Singleton believes “although the word ‘yoga’ as it is used popularly today is identical in spelling and pronunciation in each of these instances, it has quite different meanings and origins” (2010, p. 15). He adds, “in other words, it is, in short, a homonym, and it should therefore not be assumed that it refers to the same body of beliefs and practices as these other, homonymous terms” (Singleton, 2010, p. 15).

The analysis of physical health and mental health was relatively easy to manage and create typologies according to the interviews and questionnaires, however spiritual health was not as easy to create specific typologies, therefore I relied on the typologies offered in the main scriptures, such as Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, and accordingly organized my findings in spiritual health. I used many quotes from different writers in this part in order to give a better understanding of what spirituality is in this path. In the following chapter, I offer the information about the questionnaires quantitatively in addition to having already used that information in different typological ways in earlier chapters.

Ultimately, to cite an ancient quotation (which appears in the original commentary on Patanjali's sutras, and on the back of Roots of Yoga by Mallinson, James and Mark Singleton. 2017)

“Yoga is to be known by Yoga, and Yoga itself leads to Yoga. He who remains steadfast in Yoga always delights in it”.

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## Appendix A: Interview consent

Hello!

My name is Ali Moshiri, student at VID Specialized University in Stavanger. This research project is a part of my master degree thesis based upon the question, whether yoga is a kind of spirituality or a sport in the mind of those people who are attending the yoga classes.

I appreciate your participation! You should know that at anytime you can withdraw from the project without giving any reason.

My tutor is Dr. Gerd Marie Ådna, associate professor for religious studies at VID Specialized University, Stavanger .

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My email is [alimoshiry@gmail.com](mailto:alimoshiry@gmail.com)

Phone : 47739466

Regards,

## **Appendix B: interview guide**

1. What is yoga?
2. For how long you have been doing yoga?
3. Discussion about different body types (in Vedic science there are three types of bodies or constitutions name as Vata, Pitta and Kapha which can be recognized by the help of Ayurveda and Astrology to understand the nature of individuals and lead us to a correct food habits) and food habits.
4. How much you know about different styles of yoga and which one you prefer?
5. What is your goal for doing yoga?
6. What is your feeling after doing yoga?
7. Which part of the yoga class you like most (there are three parts for a Yoga section) and why?
8. Source of authority?
9. What do you feel about chanting om in yoga class? How much do you know about it and its effect on our body?
10. How much do you think meditation is important and in one hour of our yoga class how much time you like to consider for meditation and why?
11. What do you think about Shavasana? Are you following my steps? How do you think is important? Do you like we repeat same order every week or you think we should try new orders every week?
12. Explain what is your ideal yoga class? Should it be fast, slow, heavy or easy?
13. What do you think about adjustments and being corrected by instructor, both in yoga and Shavasana?
14. How do you think yoga can help you in your life or your everyday life?
15. Do you think yoga is sport or spirituality?
16. What is your sport background?
17. Cleaning body and mind has a tremendous importance in Vedic science, what is your idea about it and how important is for you and why?

18. Any book, movie, speech or course connected to yoga recently or earlier you have been tried?
19. What do you think about music in our yoga class and what type of music you prefer and why?
20. Do you like we repeat same music every time or try new one every week?
21. Why do you think men are not participating yoga classes?
22. What is the deepest joy in your life and how can you relate it to yoga, if there is any relation?
23. What is pranayama and how do you think it is important and why?
24. What is Mula Bandha?
25. How do you think yoga is related to astrology and how important is this for our life?
26. What is spirituality?

## Appendix C: sample of short questionnaire

① Kjønn:  mann  kvinne

② Alder:  <18  18-29  30-44  45-59  +60

③ Høyeste nivå av fullført utdanning?  9/10-årig skole eller kortere

Grunnkurs/ett-årig utdanning utover 9/10-årig skole

Videregående skole/gymnas/yrkesskole (3 år)

Høyskole- eller universitetsutdanning på 4 år eller mindre

Høyskole- eller universitetsutdanning på mer enn 4 år

Annet

④ Hvor lenge har du praktisert yoga?

⑤ hvorfor går du på yogaklassene og hva ønsker du å oppnå med dette?

Det er bare fysisk trening for meg

Det er noe mer enn rutinemessig trening

Det er åndelig for meg

Jeg skal delta for å lære yoga

For å få energi

Det avhenger av instruktøren

Jeg føler at jeg tilhører en spesiell gruppe mennesker

For å oppnå harmoni

For mental helse

Hjelp meg til å bli mer følelsesmessig bevisst

Det er som en religion for meg

Å komme i god form

For å gå ned i vekt

Å bli mer positiv

Å utforske mitt sinn

Å bli avslappet

For å forbedre helsen min

Å bli integrert

Å få inspirasjon

Å bli mer gladere

Å bli sett

6) Venligst velg

Jeg liker biff

Jeg liker lam

Jeg liker fisk

Jeg liker svinekjøtt

Jeg liker kylling

Jeg er vegetarianer