

Éric Baret: Dialogues on Yoga (Interview by José Le Roy)

[Interlocutor]: Very good afternoon. I am very happy to welcome Éric Baret here on the occasion of the publication of his new book by Alhora publishing house, "Dialogues on Yoga" (in paperback edition). I also want to thank the Alhora bookstore for hosting us today—thanks to Julie, Sophie, and Claude. It is a beautiful bookstore in Paris. This encounter is being recorded and the audio will be available in a few days on the Alhora publisher's website.

Besides this book, there is also another important novelty in Éric's current affairs: the book of interviews "At the School of Jean Klein," by Ludovic Fontaine, which collects dialogues with three students of Jean: Éric Baret, Francis Lucille, and Jean-Marc Mantel. I especially recommend the interview with Éric, which is truly magnificent, very beautiful, and goes straight to the heart of his teaching.

Éric is very important for Alhora; he has been with us for a long time. The publishing house was born in 2005 and when I arrived, in 2009 or 2010, there were already several of his books published, which for me was proof that the publishing house was serious. We published *Yoga: Body of Vibration, Body of Silence* in 2006, *The Only Desire* also in 2006, *The Consecration of the Green Dragon* in 2007, and *Crocodiles Don't Think* in 2008. In four years, four books by Éric came out. Then came the new editions of *Body of Silence* and *Body of Vibration* between 2010 and 2015, and *250 Questions on Yoga* in 2019. I appreciate very much that loyalty towards the publishing house; it seems to me that loyalty is also a quality of the spiritual path.

This new book, *Dialogues on Yoga*, is actually a re-edition of a part of the dialogues that were in the first edition of 2006 (*Body of Vibration, Body of Silence*). That large book was then divided into two parts without the dialogues; I don't remember well why we decided to take them out at the time.

[Éric Baret]: Between the first and the other two there were some additions.

[Interlocutor]: Yes, there were additions. But those dialogues which are magnificent had been left out; I read them again and now they are available once more. Let's talk then about yoga. I don't practice yoga, so I hope I won't say too many stupid things—you will tell me, Éric. Nowadays yoga is very much associated with Hatha

Yoga, with postures, with studios where it is practiced for health. But your yoga seems to have nothing to do with that. Would you agree with defining your yoga as an "art of listening"? I have the impression that for you yoga is a way of being open to everything that presents itself: sensations, perceptions, emotions... because often we are not attentive to all that. It seems to me that "yoga" is, for you, a name for that listening to everything that happens.

[Éric Baret]: Yes and no. I wouldn't like to lock listening in there; it's not exclusively tied to yoga. Master Eckhart lived in that listening and didn't practice yoga. So listening and yoga are not synonyms. Let's say that in the approach that Jean Klein transmitted—and that he called "corporal approach" to give it a practical connotation—, and that he later called "Kashmir Yoga" (although that name doesn't mean much), the accent is placed on *realizing that we don't listen*.

Yoga effectively stimulates listening, but it is important to understand that listening is not tied to yoga; one can have a profound life without doing it. The accent is on discovering to what point we don't listen, to what point we anticipate, review the past, or project the future. It is the awareness of those mechanisms that eventually leads us to moments of true openness.

[Interlocutor]: And yet, yoga is usually associated with postures, with *asanas*. What then is the role of postures in this yoga? If it's about seeing that we don't listen, how does the posture help us?

[Éric Baret]: It's simply a practical element. If you gather a group of people and tell them "we are going to surrender to listening," for most that turns out to be too intangible. The practice of yoga is, like any art, a bit of a pretext for the meeting. We could dance, sing, do calligraphy or martial arts; for me it would be exactly the same. The end of the meeting is to stimulate listening. Abhinavagupta, in one of the chapters of the *Tantrāloka*, says that the one whom he calls *sahridaya*—the one who has a sensitive heart, a receptive soul—is closer to clarity in a moment of theater or dance than a yogi in his cave identifying with his "defects" or his efforts.

So already for Abhinavagupta there existed this notion of artistic observation as listening. He says that if there is an environment where other people have that same perspective, that same listening, a sort of mutual stimulation is produced. Finally, a meeting is that: fifty people who come to do nothing. It is that dynamic without objective direction that stimulates listening.

Now, as most people have bodies that are not in very good condition—because they spend eight hours a day sitting without moving—, immobility is very difficult for them. That's why we go a bit forward, a bit backward, to the floor face down, face up, a bit on the head... it's only a pretext, because exterior immobility is very difficult

to preserve for many. But if people came with a deep corporal availability, we could stay sitting together and it would be the same. Movement is simply easier; people need to move.

[Interlocutor]: You spoke of clarity just now, and in the interview with Ludovic Fontaine I noticed this phrase: "yoga is not a means to reach clarity, but a means to express that clarity."

[Éric Baret]: Abhinavagupta says in his *Tantrāloka* that yoga does not lead to consciousness, but rather it is consciousness that leads to yoga. Within the vision of Kashmir Shaivism, the approach is not progressive; it's not that "the less" must go towards "the more." Yoga is, in this sense, an art of realizing, first, that one doesn't listen, and through that the listening is stimulated.

That stimulation will eventually lead some people to realize to what point listening is for them simply a concept. Mentally they believe they listen, but when their partner cheats on them, when their child is sick, when they don't know how to pay the rent, they realize that they abandon that listening. Faced with pain or affective conflict, they lose listening. They only listen when everything goes well. But partners are not always faithful, children are not always healthy, bodies are not always perfect...

So, yoga consists in transposing the listening that one has in a moment of tranquility towards tenderness and towards violence; towards pleasure and towards pain. That is to say, to lead the body and the psyche to be able to integrate listening in the different modalities of life, and that it doesn't remain only as a possibility in moments of clarity, because as soon as an affective conflict appears, that listening disappears. It is a transposition. It is the presentiment of listening that leads someone to realize that, although they talk about listening and are interested in it, when their hip is blocked or they have an affective conflict, they no longer listen. It involves integrating listening in the corporal and mental elements.

[Interlocutor]: And there you cited Abhinavagupta and Tántric Shaivism several times, which is one of your great references, as it was for Jean as well. On the other hand, you are quite hard on Patañjali. Nowadays yoga is almost always associated with Patañjali and his *Yoga Sūtras*, a text that everyone venerates. What is it that you criticize there?

[Éric Baret]: It's not that I'm hard on him. First, Patañjali is a way of speaking; he is not necessarily a person, it's a set of texts probably. Also, it's a text of immense complexity that, if the Vedic culture in which it was written is not understood, it translates very poorly. Every month some incompetent appears with a new translation since thirty years ago, and it is just as null as the previous ones.

It's a text made for ascetics, that is, it's Vedic. The great difference between the Vedic and the tantric approach is that the Vedic is made for men and for ascetics, and it's based on the notion of purity and impurity. Those notions are not recognized in tantrism. In India, a woman or someone of low caste did not have access to Vedic teaching, but they could indeed access tantrism.

The Vedic approach is the passage from impurity to purity. It's a "fascist" discipline, and I don't say it in a negative sense, but in the sense that whoever commits to asceticism has that same impulse of wanting to go towards purity. I don't say it's false, but it's reserved for a true ascetic trajectory. Wanting to apply that today in yoga schools, to people who go to do an hour of yoga per day, pretending to follow the *Yamas* and *Niyamas*, seems to me of a total stupidity.

Observances and abstinences are, in reality, from the point of view of Kashmir—Abhinavagupta also points it out in the *Tantrāloka*—, the ultimate result of the integration of consciousness. When someone is free of themselves, they no longer need to protect themselves, nor lie, nor appropriate things, nor steal. But asking a person, an ego, for egotic remedies, is adding negativity to negativity. That is the approach of Patañjali.

Forbidding someone who lives with a deep inner pathology—which is the case of the human being in general—that which makes them live, seems to me a form of violence. Abhinavagupta calls the Vedic approach *Kṛtrima*, which means artificial. He says that for us what's natural is first the awareness, that presentiment, and that then that integrates corporally and mentally. Then, the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* will be the ultimate expression of consciousness, not a means to reach it.

[Interlocutor]: Yes, I remember texts by Abhinavagupta that criticize the postures of yoga.

[Éric Baret]: Absolutely!

[Interlocutor]: You compare your yoga with an art. Is it an art in the sense that, just as the violinist must know how to master his violin well to play...?

[Éric Baret]: No, it's an art because it's gratuitous. And because it serves no purpose. If it served for something, it would form part of the Vedic process of purification. When Abhinavagupta says that clarity leads to yoga and not the other way around, he means that clarity is not causal. Therefore, no activity is going to produce it. As it is said in Islam: "God is closer than the jugular vein," therefore one cannot "approach" God.

When Ibn Arabi describes the trip of the Prophet—his own trip—on the mount Al-Buraq, where he finds different levels, in reality he ends up seeing himself standing next to God. Ibn Arabi specifies that it is not a trip *towards* God (because you cannot approach if he is already closer than your jugular vein), but rather it is a trip *in the signs* of God. It is the same language of non-appropriation.

So, the practice is a form of exteriorization of presentiment. And it's an art in the sense that it is useless. That a musician plays three hours of violin per day, or that a dancer dances, what is it for? For nothing. The dancer could go and take care of the old women who are dying in the hospital, or produce wells in Africa... but what does he do? He plays the violin. It serves for nothing.

And the yogi, in the morning, inhales, exhales, raises an arm, lowers an arm... What is it for? For nothing. It is that familiarity with gratuitousness that matters. It is the evidence that what I seek does not come through a causal development. If one allows oneself to be totally free of any dynamic towards something, there the true dynamic appears. In that sense Jean Klein saw it as an art.

[Interlocutor]: Yoga passes through the body, but of the body you speak it's very interesting, because you usually say that in reality we don't know the body, that we have a concept, an illusion, sometimes you even say an imagination or a defense.

[Éric Baret]: Yes, it's a fear. What people call "their body" is a fear. It's a body schema that was created very early in life. To give myself security, I created a muscular body of defense, of aggression; the legs, the arms, the jaws... the whole body became a survival mechanism.

What people call "feeling the body" is feeling a tension. When someone says "I feel my back," what do they mean? They feel a tension in the back. When they say "I feel my heart," it's that there is an agitation. If you feel your teeth, it's that you have a problem. The nature of the body is not to be felt. When you enjoy good health, you don't feel your body. If you look at the full moon, you don't feel anything more than that. If you feel your body, it's that there is a corporal problem.

The body is made not to be felt. When you walk down the street, you don't feel your body. Organic systems work not to be felt. In that moment, the body is an organism of information. If I step on a nail, I feel the foot; that is an information that I must pay attention. The body tells me "careful." I bring my hand close to a flame and the hand tells me "careful," I withdraw it. Feeling the body is a technical information to pay attention.

But what people call "feeling the body" habitually is feeling a tension. It's a reaction, a defense created in childhood to survive blows, caresses, vicissitudes. That tactile

representation is fixed in the brain and we say "I feel my body." It's not true. Traditional yoga seeks to put into question that body schema: what is the true sensation of the body when I take out all the corporal defenses, all that I did to survive? It's an art of exploration of the body schema in a moment where there is no longer a need to defend itself.

The classic sensation is a schema. A psychiatrist, when receiving a child, asks him to draw a house or a tree, and sees there immediately the child's problems. The body schema is expressed in the drawing, in motor skills, in breathing.

[Interlocutor]: And you indicate people to listen to the sensation and let the body dissolve into space.

[Éric Baret]: Yes, because the natural sensation of the body is non-separation with the environment. Separation is a thought, not an objective reality. Since I created a body to defend myself, progressively, by tactilizing the defenses, I no longer have need to block the hips or tense the shoulders. When I no longer need to invent myself nor defend myself, that tactile non-separation with the environment appears naturally. But it has to be tactile, if not it's only a concept.

[Interlocutor]: Precisely with that tactile approach, it seems to me very interesting the work you do on emotions and traumas. To those who have those traumas, instead of seeking the cause in the past, you invite them to feel the emotion, the sensation, which leads to a liberation.

[Éric Baret]: One must be honest. Jean Klein was very clear in this: when the trauma is superficial, the simple fact of feeling it can allow it to rise to the surface and be liberated. But if the trauma is very deep, that is not enough. One has to start by listening to it. By listening to a trauma, it begins to change place.

It's like when your knee hurts and the office works your shoulder. Why? Because the problem comes from the shoulder, you compensated with the hip and ended up feeling the knee. What seems to us to be the trauma is in reality a covering of older traumas that we could not face.

With a tactile approach, we let the tip of the iceberg live, the apparent trauma, and little by little we are led towards another tactile periphery, and then another, until we find the essential knot. If there is a listening without intention, the intuition of how to intervene can arise. But it is no longer an intervention by reaction to "take out" the trauma, but rather to listen to it better. It can be a surgery, a therapy, a massage, a dietary change... but that technicity must come from listening, not from reaction. If the trauma is very strong, a technical intervention will be necessary, but based on listening. That is no longer my domain, I am not a therapist, but I can orient the

person so that they find the right therapist (a Jungian, a psychiatrist, a kinesiologist...).

[Éric Baret]: When a trauma is light and the person has a certain maturity, when they understood that the past is over, that it's dead... what happened at five years old is already done. I don't need to carry that past. Situations do not cause the trauma by themselves. Jacques Lusseyran spent two years in Buchenwald and came out being a happy man. That proves that Buchenwald does not turn you unhappy necessarily.

But after the war, in the meetings of deportees, they received him very poorly. He had to go to the United States because the other deportees did not tolerate that he told them that one could be happy after Buchenwald. And when he told the blind (he was blind) that one could be happy being blind, they threw him out with violence. In our societies there is a valuation of sufficiency, of suffering, influenced by Christian ghosts. It is believed that one has to be unhappy because of the trauma.

It's not the situation what breaks someone. Most in Buchenwald were broken, but the fact that only one wasn't proves that it's possible. And he was with the blind, in worse conditions. What matters is the availability we have before the trauma. Both my parents lived through violent things in the war. My father fought against German divisions, walked over corpses... and had no traumas. My mother, when she saw her brother's body dismembered by the Gestapo, took fifty years to forget it.

We are unequal before this. That's why seeking the origin is a waste of time. You are going to get to Buchenwald, to the aggression... but that is not the root. One has to go further back, to birth, to the previous life... it is endless. That's why for us it's wasting time.

[Interlocutor]: And it's a process without end.

[Éric Baret]: Sometimes, when a trauma unfolds tactically and is reabsorbed, historical visions of the past can appear that are liquidated, but it's not indispensable. I had a student in Athens, the man who created the metro there. He had been kidnapped in Beirut by Palestinians and tortured every day for three months. He had no post-traumatic stress trauma. He had discovered on his own that it wasn't the blows that traumatized him, but the fear of the blows. He did a work when he heard the steps in the hallway, when the door opened... he realized it was the fear of the next blow what broke him, not the blow itself.

Jacques Lusseyran did the same experience with the Gestapo. He saw that when he got angry with his torturer, he suffered much more. When he reached being at

peace with what was happening, the experience changed. This man from Athens has no psychological trauma; he has physical traumas, but that is life. One can be happy with a broken hip. We wouldn't be happy with the idea that they shouldn't have tortured us.

[Interlocutor]: And does this capacity for listening develop progressively or is it discovered suddenly?

[Éric Baret]: There are two things. Profound understanding, conviction, is sudden. I have no experience of that, I say it because of what others have formulated, like Ramana Maharshi or Nisargadatta Maharaj, but it's not of my domain. On the contrary, for most there is a sort of progressivity in seeing our own arrogance. One sees how one functions.

[Éric Baret]: I give you an example from Marseille which is very revealing. I was there one morning drinking my wine and I saw a jewelry store across from the Canebière. The owner, a well-dressed guy, arrives at his business and finds a disgusting beggar sleeping at his door. And starts kicking him. At that time I wasn't someone very tender; I saw that, I stood up and went towards him thinking: "You're going to see what it feels like to receive kicks." But in an instant I realized I was exactly like him. He was bothered by the beggar and kicked him; I was bothered by his violence and wanted to hit him. It was the same nature.

This is fundamental: every time something shocks us, it's because we are of the same nature as that which shocks us. We don't tolerate homosexuality or arrogance in others because that is in us. Seeing that mechanism is what allows something to change.

[Interlocutor]: In this art of listening you say: "nothing is listened to" and "nobody listens."

[Éric Baret]: Of course, because duality is a cerebral representation. In reality, there is neither perception nor perceived object. It's our brain what forces us to see it like that. If my dog were here and I wanted to describe to him what happens when I feel the fresh wind on my face... if my dog were of an "inferior" breed, I would tell him: "I feel the wind." If he were more advanced, I would tell him: "it's my cheek what I feel." But if he were brilliant, I would tell him: "what I feel I cannot say." Because deep down I don't even "feel" it, there is something that simply **is** there.

To formulate it, I'm obliged to use the subject-object relationship: "I feel the wind" or "I feel my cheek." But it's a limitation of our semantics and our cerebral conditioning. Formulating in dual terms something that, in experience, is non-dual, doesn't mean duality is real; it means language doesn't allow another option.

[Éric Baret]: Yes, Jean Klein spoke of the two fears: the one that paralyzes and the one that gives wings. I experienced the paralyzing one when we were boys: a motorcycle was coming, I had three seconds to move, but I had so much fear I couldn't move and it hit me. Then, 30 years ago in Nepal with a Tibetan friend... we were carrying some "unlicit" articles and when turning a corner we found ourselves with a police blockade. I really felt fear, but my friend—who risked much more than me—looked at me and we both burst into laughter. We crossed the blockade laughing and they let us pass without searching us. That's feeling the fear without being the fear. The tantric approach consists in feeling the emotion without the "I."

[Interlocutor]: Éric, what exactly is "charas oil"?

[Éric Baret]: That is an excellent question, so excellent that it has no answer. You have to find it. But it's the only thing you're never going to forget.

[Interlocutor]: I understand. And at the same time, you don't like much the word "non-duality" either. You say it doesn't exist, that it's a dualistic concept that comes from a lack of clarity.

[Éric Baret]: Of course, the word "non-duality" implies that duality exists. And as there is no duality, neither can there be "non-duality." They are cerebral representations with pedagogical value. To a child you tell "you did well" or "you did bad," even if it's not true, because pedagogically it can be justified to educate a child or a dog. It's only a pedagogical way of living.

[Interlocutor]: And how is it practiced concretely? How much time? Do you give indications about this once people finish a workshop?

[Éric Baret]: First, when the workshop ends, one no longer returns. The one who returns is because he didn't understand. That is the first thing. Afterwards, to the unfortunates who took notes I tell them to throw them away. There is nothing to remember, because if one remembers, one is going to repeat. And life is not in repetition, but in absolute novelty.

Then we say: «Forget everything!». If something concerns you, it will return to you at some point, but not in my way, but in yours. And that yes, listen to it and follow your resonance. If you follow that resonance, you're going to sit on your mat and you're going to do like the first yogi. What did the first yogi do? He didn't listen to anyone, because he didn't have anyone to listen to. He didn't have videos, nor books, nor Almora publishing house. Simply listened.

One has to do the same. It is the only possibility to return to the primordial listening. And as we are not a zebra nor a crocodile, our body is going to move in a specific

way. We will have moments of exterior immobility—because real immobility doesn't exist, everything is movement—and then the body is going to move forward, towards the right, backward... We are going to end up finding all the movements of yoga naturally, because we have a specific articular structure.

Sometimes one suggests observing the breath, but that's usually a resource due to lack of pedagogy in other schools. They tell you: «breathe in the belly». We say no, that it's not true. If you open your belly with a knife, you're going to see that there's no air there. Breathing «in the belly» is an image. «Breathing in space» is another image. The image of breathing in the body brings a centering, it's a resource for the ego; the image of breathing in space brings an expansion, it's a resource for consciousness. They are only tools, not objective realities.

Why do I use the word "listening"? Because it lends itself little to the spiritual imaginary. When we talk about "consciousness", "presence", "being", a lot of mental noise is created. There are people who say they are "aware of consciousness" (*aware of awareness*), which is the height of absurdity. The word "listening" leaves little room for pseudo-spiritual imagination. Nobody feels proud to be "in listening." It is an "anti-spiritual" word and that's why I like it. But, like everything else, one shouldn't take it literally: in reality it means nothing. Because, as we were saying before, there is nothing that is listened to nor anyone who listens.

The "person" is a symbolic representation. When we say "it rains", there is nobody "raining", the raining happens. When we say "I walk", it's a symbolic way of speaking; there's nobody walking. Digestion, respiration, healing happen alone. And thought also happens alone. The thought "carrot" happens. A "thinker" is not necessary for there to be a thought. The "thinker" is only another thought more. But by lack of clarity, I imagine I am the one who thinks. Believing oneself a "thinker", a "man" or a "Frenchman" is born from fear.

I took enough LSD to realize that what one thinks is pure mechanics. You take a red pill and think in one way, you take a blue one and think in another. What we think is a reaction to our biology, to our parents, to our culture. We are not responsible for anything: not for our sexuality, nor our opinions, nor our cultural identity. Juridically it's something else, but psychologically we are not responsible. For that reason, at a given moment, the notion of "thinker" is a totally gratuitous appropriation.

[Interlocutor]: It's already half past eight, perhaps a last question. Éric, you mentioned that most people don't interest themselves in this. Is there any prerequisite to open up to this dimension?

[Éric Baret]: There are no prerequisites. To the one who is not interested it is because he doesn't need it, and life is just as beautiful in him. Consciousness is not more present in the one who is interested in this than in the one who prefers tennis or soccer. There is no hierarchy; a sage is not "more" than an ignorant, they are only different expressions of life. Abhinavagupta mentions the five aspects of Shiva's consciousness: creation, maintenance, dissolution, revelation and... concealment (ignorance). And he puts concealment, ignorance, as the peak of consciousness. It is the greatest power.

[Éric Baret]: For those who feel touched by this presentiment of life, it's usually because they already tried everything else. You have a faithful husband, a great lover, your children are healthy, you have health, you have a good pension, you have a good car... and yet, you feel that something is missing. You realize that changing husband or car is not going to work. At night, when you are alone in your intimacy, you know there is something that is not there. You know what it is *not*, but you don't know what it *is*.

That is the profile of the one who listens: when all the energies that before were used in a centrifugal way to seek the solution outside, return to their center naturally due to lack of use. You already know that nothing you do is going to work: neither divorcing, nor traveling to India, nor learning Sanskrit, nor doing yoga, nor changing your diet. In that rest of energy, in that silence, is where the presentiment of truth can reveal itself. As long as you keep thinking that some external situation is going to save you, you remain in the imaginary.

[Interlocutor]: Very well. Thank you, Éric, thank you very much.