

MEDITATION IN THE CLASSICAL YOGA TRADITION

We're going to look at meditation from the perspective of Patanjali and within the metaphor of the Russian doll. Previously we looked at *pranayama*, which is the second of the six Russian dolls. Before that we looked much more deeply at *asana*, which is the first doll in the infolding of yoga. Before that there is *yama* and *niyama*, being the first two limbs of yoga: they are the package or the cover. Even before that we looked at the nature of the Russian doll. So you can see that even though you can access these Russian dolls, these six inner stages of yoga, one by one in a linear manner they co-exist within each other simultaneously all the time.

So what this means is that *pranayama* is just the inner face of *asana*. And *pratyahara* is the inner face of *pranayama*, whereby the mind has to pass into meditation, into *dharana dhyana samadhi*. *Pratyahara* is something that is widely and somewhat disastrously misunderstood. *Pratyahara* is normally taken to be a process whereby you take control of your senses and you cut them off from the outside world. This is actually not possible when you're alive. You can't stop your nervous system from functioning; you can't stop your sensory nerves from receiving stimulation. You can't stop your tympanic membrane from vibrating to sound waves.

This is just one more card in the hocus pocus pack of yoga having been turned into some kind of circus performance system. When you are deeply absorbed in thought you're in *pratyahara*. When you're deeply absorbed in contemplation of something, considering something or trying to make your mind up about something, what data or stimulation is coming through your senses into your brain is irrelevant to what you are doing. You don't notice it, you don't feel it, you don't pay any attention to it. But it is still being received by the brain. It's just not reaching the conscious mind.

Whether this is a physical brain thing or a mental thing, sensory information is constantly being filtered out and reduced to a bare minimum arriving in the conscious mind. One of the most obvious things that happens when you take LSD is as it inhibits the glucose to a certain part of the brain, it opens this filter and all of a sudden you're bombarded by sensations or information coming in through your senses that because you're not used to it, is totally disorganised and chaotic and bears no reference to your normal input status. So there is a built in filtering mechanism that children develop from the very first moment from the way that we relate to them. What we ask them to relate to, what we

ask them to feel and touch, what we ask them to hear and see creates this filtering mechanism. How much it's in the brain, how much it's in the mind I don't know and it doesn't really matter. It's there.

The filter can close completely between the conscious mind and the brain so that you can be deep in thought and have no idea of what's going on around you. I'll give you an example, a rather shameful example of this, from my own experience. Of course, I have no clear memory of this. I am told by the witnesses, my mother, father, brother, sister, that this is what happened. One day when I wanted to go from the hall to the kitchen via the breakfast room where they were all eating, just before I entered the room my grandmother fell backwards with her chair onto the floor. I merely stepped across her as I went to the kitchen, grabbed something, turned round and stepped across her again and left the room. I didn't see her consciously but obviously in order to have stepped over her my system saw her, my body saw her, my brain saw her, told my body what to do. But I was so deeply involved in getting whatever it was that I wanted that I didn't notice. If you ask five witnesses to a car crash to describe what happened you have five different events being described. Everybody filters data according to the conditioned nature of their filtering mechanism.

So *pratyahara* is actually going on all the time to a certain extent. The information coming through your senses is not reaching the conscious mind. When your depth of internalised relaxation is enough you are no longer in the grip of the information coming through your senses. You are internally focused, internally present. Whether you're in a cold room or a hot room; whether you're in Spain or in Italy; whether there are people around you or not is not only irrelevant but completely beyond your knowability. You're not in a position to say if everybody got up and left the room. You're not in a position to say whether it got warmer or colder. But your body knows perfectly well these changes in its environment.

In my words this is what Patanjali says is *pratyahara*: 'The senses releasing their object and losing their power over the mind is *pratyahara*.' I would say this is a state that we all know. When we're deeply absorbed in thought the senses no longer have any power over the mind. The mind is doing its own thing and the objects of the senses are of course still there. But releasing them means no longer attending to them, no longer being subject to their magnetism.

Usually the so called authorities are telling you that you must do something for *pratyahara*. and also for *dharana* That you must withdraw and then you must fix. The word Patanjali uses that is interpreted as binding is *bandha*. Now i don't think this word has to mean bind, or tie, or lock, or restrict. So I like to take the word *bandha* in this instance to mean 'internal suspension.' You could say that the *bandhas* in the body are external suspension brackets. In the mind they are suspension on a single point or perception. So *dharana*, as far as I'm concerned, is when the mind has come to rest on something or in something: just one perception. In other words, what *dharana* is, is what most people think that meditation is: the mind having come to stillness on an object.

According to Patanjali, *dharana* is just the first of three aspects of the meditative process. The second two being *dhyana* and *samadhi*. The question is, what's the relationship between *pranayama*, *pratyahara* and *dharana* when *pranayama* is defined, as it is by Patanjali, as the gateway to *dharana*? Why is *pratyahara* put in between? Between *pranayama* and *dharana* there is *pratyahara*. If *dharana* means the mind coming to stillness on a single point and *pratyahara* means the mind is no longer caught by sensory information, the difference between *pratyahara* and *dharana* is simply this. In *pratyahara*, different perceptions or different objects of awareness are replacing each other one by one in a flow. And then that flow stops when the mind relaxes more on one of them. The key is when the mind relaxes more.

I'll give you an example. Let's say you're sitting in relaxed silence and the senses are no longer producing reactions in the mind. Sensory information is no longer producing reactions in the mind. So you're sitting there and you have this sudden memory of walking down a particular street or skiing over a particular rock. Whatever. You have this sudden memory. This is not related to what's actually going on; you're sitting in the room meditating. But you're so relaxed, you're so unconcerned about anything that you don't follow that thought. You don't say: 'Oh I wonder why that thought's arising.' You don't say: 'I wonder what that means.' It just arises and then it disappears and then another memory comes up. It doesn't have to be a memory, it can be any kind of mental impression. But not coming from your senses.

Usually when you're relaxed, you're meditating, even doing your yoga, all kinds of images jump into your mind. And sometimes you get caught by them. But in *pratyahara* you don't. There's just one and then another and then another and then another. Maybe because things are not stable you may oscillate out of *dharana* for a moment and have a thought about that one. And then it doesn't interest you so you relax back again and another one is there.

So within Patanjali's world view, he regards these thoughts as arising from what he calls the 'action deposit'. You could call this 'the personal subconscious.' But Patanjali being more sophisticated than your average psychiatrist would say that this action deposit goes into other lifetimes also. It's where your karma is laid down, where your tendencies are laid down. When you are relaxed enough, meditation begins when this deposit is releasing its energy into your mind. In doing so, as the energy rises, it produces a perception: normally an image, sometimes a feeling or a thought.

The transition from *dharana* to *dhyana* is also very simple. If an image of you walking down the street just stays there with no resistance to it, no attempt to modulate, control or interpret it, if you're relaxed enough to let it just be there, then it opens into *dhayana*. What that would mean is: all of a sudden, as well as seeing this image of yourself in the street, you might smell it. You might even be able to taste the meal that you'd just had, or whatever. And then you might know why you're walking down that street, where you're going towards, where you're coming from. And it can open more than that.

Once that starts to happen however, there's a huge tendency for the mind to start interpreting, to start saying: 'Oh yes and this is...' And then you've gone right out of the yoga relaxed mind into your thinking mind, into your thinking mind which is trying to make up a story. A story to explain this without realising that the reason why that's happening is because there is a deeper resistance to going into this thing. Because usually inside it there is or there was pain in its cause. So what we have to do here is to take a look at Patanjali's view of human psychology. Which is somewhat different from Freud. It's a very interesting one.

According to Patanjali *dhyana* is where the apparent and subtle nature of a phenomenon or a perception are revealed in the conditions of its form,

implication and context. Patanjali being Patanjali said no more than that: form, implication and context. But this is an explanation of what happens when a *pratyaya* (perceptual impression) opens. You see the form, you see the implication and you see the context of that perception all the way to its source.

The form of *pratyaya* is, an image of you walking down the street with a certain smell in the air and a certain flavour on your tongue. This is the form. The implications of that impression are the *vasana* and the *samskara*. That impression implies the existence of a *samskara* which can be found. And that *samskara* implies a past experience. So this is what the unravelling of a perception means. You begin to be aware of the form and the implications of that impression. Yes, it turned out that you were raped by every white guy that you met in the first five years of your teenage life, or whatever it was. The context of any phenomenon can be seen in two ways: from the point of view of the impression itself or from the point of view of the initial experience. From the point of view of the mental residue or from the point of view of the initial experience. Both are valid. The context of the *samskara* is your whole mind structure. And the context of the experience is the totality of the universe.

So what *dhyana* means is that from a single impression having been suspended in your mind in *dharana*, your awareness sees through, *paravishtu*, the form, the implications and the context of that impression so completely, so thoroughly that you see the interconnected nature of all phenomena. You see the interconnected nature of all aspects of your behaviour. You see the interconnected nature of all aspects of your mind so clearly that you can see that there is no mind. There is no individual mind, thinker, doer. And then you fall into *samadhi*.

You do not see this with a thinking mind. You do not see this like a movie playing out before you. The movie like aspect of it is the form, so there is a certain element of that but as you go deeper, as you relax deeper, the implication and the context are just known by a shift in your perspective. Everything gets connected organically. When you go into *asana*, you're shifting away from the perspective of the doer. When you're in *pranayama*, you're shifting away, relaxing away, from the perspective of the breather. And when you're going from *dhyana* into *samadhi*, you're shifting away from the seer, from the perceiver, from the sense of self. And in that shift, you could say

the totality of the interconnectedness of all conditions and impersonal phenomena asserts itself not as the apprehension of information but as an experience, as a being state, as a state of selflessness. As a state of embeddedness in the totality of the universe. As a state of peace and acceptance.

And then you come into *samadhi*. And Patanjali's definition of *samadhi* is: 'apparent form radiating the singular significance of emptiness.' This is where you end up. Apparent form is whatever you like. The impression, the doer, the world, being seen to be quite clearly nothing other than the radiation of emptiness, a totally self complete, totally interconnected, totally conditioned, totally impersonal indivisible unity. And that's the meditative mind, according to Patanjali.

You can see that it can give you a deep relief; a powerful release from identification with impulses, with behavioural tendencies. If you go far enough into it you could say it establishes a perspective of 'impersonal awareness of being.' You end up simply enjoying impersonal awareness of life's unfolding without reference to a doer, a seer, an experiencer or any experience. In that meditative moment or that meditative passage, it's all been left behind. All identification has been released and then you are in *cittavrttiniroda*.

When you meditate and you really relax and you're no longer being caught by the thinking mind or by the senses, your soul will take you in this direction. It will release energy as *pratyaya*. The *pratyaya* creating an impression means that you're not totally relaxed. When you're totally relaxed, a *pratyaya* doesn't create an impression. The *pratyaya* dissolves in the light of your awareness and so does the *samskara* without you even ever knowing what it was. So in this way you burn up your karma without even knowing what it was when you're really really relaxed. If an impression is being created in the mind, you're not totally relaxed. And when you are so relaxed that impressions are not created you can feel the *pratyaya*, the energy rising and it dissolves into your awareness. As it dissolves into your awareness your awareness deepens and you relax more. In that deepening of your awareness the delight inherent in awareness deepens. And that is an invitation for you to stay relaxed and to meet more and more *pratyaya* like that so they burn up until your legs or mind can't handle it anymore. You don't know what's being burnt up. There is no knower to know. But it's being burnt up.

So people whose relaxation is deep enough in meditation, who meditate enough, they go away for one, two or three months, and they're just not doing the same things anymore. Not reacting in the same ways that they used to anymore. And they don't even know they've gone through it. But they will know that they've gone through something when they see themselves reacting differently, more healthily. And that's the healing process of meditation. Within it is the insight process that liberates you in seeing that actually this didn't happen to anyone. There is no doer, no self. There is no one who was kicked down the stairs. There's just a bodimind. The bodimind does not need to hold onto that. It does not want to hold on to that; that holding on is holding it back from being fully expressed and alive.

Now I'm just going to take a direct look at *samadhi* in connection to this infolding. Or, as Pelle would eloquently put it, this falling into yoga. I'm not joking when I say 'falling into' because it is like that. You fall into it, you lose your ground, you lose your bearings, your support. You just fall into this delightful freefall: the unfolding, the unravelling of a perception in terms of its form, implications and context. You could say that the final phase of this unravelling blurs into *samadhi*. The final phase of this unravelling is the seeing through, the *parivishthu*, of the seer, of the sense of self. The recognition that there is no such thing as a perceiver; there's just perceiving going on in an organism. An organism facilitating the innate functioning of consciousness expressing itself through that organism.

Patanjali is quite technical in his presentation of *samadhi* and he refers to it a few times in a few different places. However, at a certain point he defines it and that point is the presentation of the Eight Limbs. Patanjali's definition of *samadhi* is astoundingly revelatory. At least when I translate it.

What Patanjali actually says is: *artha matra nirbasam svarupa sunyam*

Artha means purpose or significance.

Matra means only.

Nirbasam means to radiate or shine forth.

Svarupa is self form, or own form, or apparent form.

Sunyam is emptiness.

And he puts those two words together: 'apparent form' and emptiness juxtaposed directly.

So the words that Patanjali gives are: 'significance, only, radiating, apparent form, emptiness. So I translate that as closely as I can: 'Apparent form radiating the singular significance of emptiness.' This is the most beautiful presentation of the possibilities of human consciousness and the relationship between all opposites. Apparent form radiating the singular significance of emptiness. This is a statement of non-duality within or behind duality.

So why does Patanjali say *ardhamatra*; why does he say 'single significance', 'only significance'? What he's saying could be interpreted in many ways but one way it can be interpreted is: the only real significance of any apparent object is totality itself. That the essence, the meaning, the significance, the true nature of any object is emptiness which is a totality. It's not an absence, it's a fullness of all potentiality, of all existence and all non-existence. So this definition of *samadhi* is also a definition of the dynamic of non-duality expressing through duality. It is in a way the most important sutra in the whole thing because it goes right to the heart of the matter. There is a duality that we experience in every dimension of our lives but it is inherently a non-duality.

The overt is a radiation of the covert. The body is a radiation of consciousness. Any object is a radiation or expression of consciousness or emptiness and this is the only thing. This is a very pertinent, powerful and helpful presentation of *samadhi*. First of all, it indicates that the world, the illusion, reality, *maya*, does not have to disappear for *samadhi* to be present. That *samadhi* is the radiation of the source through the manifestation, that *samadhi* is the radiation of emptiness through form. *Samadhi* is the radiation of unity through multiplicity, of unity through diversity. The point here is the radiation.

Samadhi is the recognising of this non-duality so that the luminosity of that non-duality is enjoyed. It doesn't mean that *samadhi* is establishing this non-duality. It doesn't mean that form is not expressing emptiness except in the state of *samadhi*. It means in the state of *samadhi* this is seen in the luminosity of clear seeing. Form radiates the scent of emptiness, the implications of emptiness. Which means that you cannot take form so seriously, so personally anymore. But you're still taking it; it's still there but you don't take it so personally.