

THE YOGA DARSHANA

Yoga is one of those things that pretty much everyone has heard of, even if they don't know what it really is. Everyone has their own ideas about what it might be. When I first heard of yoga I thought it was lying on beds of nails and walking over glass. I thought this was what yogis did: swallow poison. Even amongst books written in india there are some very fundamental conflicts in what is said about yoga. If you add to that books about yoga written in the west, the conflicts become more and deeper. Nevertheless yoga is something very specific.

The culture of india is very old: much older than ours. It's a very sophisticated culture. However its orientation is very different from ours: so it can look like it's not very sophisticated as it didn't develop mechanical engineering. So we can easily think it is not as sophisticated as ours because mechanical engineering has allowed us to dominate all cultures that didn't have it. But the orientation of the indian mind is not to matter, not to the seen but to the invisible, to spirit, energy, consciousness. And in that the indian mind has been very sophisticated.

Western science is based on certain fundamentals like logic, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology: and now they are proliferating into many many different specialities. Likewise india has it's six sciences or it's six dharsana, one of which is yoga: which is wildly proliferating and distorting now. Yoga is one of the six sciences or pillars of indian thought, in the same way that physics is one of the pillars of western science. Yoga has it's own inherent set of principles. Just as physics does. These principles were laid down in the yoga sutras by Patanjali. He didnt invent them. He codified what had been found to be intrinsic to human consciousness.

Patanjali doesn't say very much about doing: very little about practice. Of technique he says virtually nothing. Whereas all of the medieval yoga books like the Hathayogapradipika are about technique. Now they can truly be called yoga only if the application of those techniques points directly in experiance to what Patanjali is talking about. If not then it is just a marketing ploy. What Svatmarama, Goraksha and the other johnny come lately hathayogis had to say is not at the root of indian thought. But what Patanjali

said is. He is regarded as one of the six pillars of indian thinking which means one of the six ways to relate directly to the truth: just as physics is an attempt to directly relate to the truth of the way things actually are, to the way things actually happen. Physics is a description of how things actually happen in the physical world. The yoga sutras are a description of how things actually happen in human consciousness, in the mind.

Patanjali uses 200 short verses to describe what happens in the mind, to describe the nature of human consciousness. But most of them are explaining some of the other ones. So there are only a few basic statements that he has to make. The first one is at the beginning of the second chapter. Patanjali says "*kriya-yoga-tapas-svadyaya-ishvarapranidana*". Ok, this is five words but five words that are not like European words. A sanskrit word is not really at all like a european word. A box is always an enclosure with six sides, even if one is missing. A box is never a spherical enclosure, or a rod: though to the primitive it can be a motor car. A box is always a box.

But sanskrit doesn't work like that at all. The compound parts of a word don't point to objects in sanskrit. They point to tendencies: in other words they point more to actions. Sanskrit is a process based language whereas european languages are object based and you can't make a direct comparison. So f the word yoga can be inserted into a sentence where it means that whereby you enslave, bind oxen. Or it can be used, as Patanjali does, to mean the way of liberating human beings. So we must be very careful when we look at sanskrit and we think we are translating it into english. If Patanjali uses five words we probably need 25 to qualify the object nature of our language. So when Patanjali says "*kriya-yoga-tapas-svadyaya-ishvarapranidana*" he is saying a lot more than we could say in five english words.

The first word *Kriya* means process or activity or happening. It depends how loose you can be. The more loose you can get it the more accurate you can be when you come back to the point. The point is the context within which the word is found, which are the other words which neighbour it. So just for the sake of simplicity I'll take the word activity to represent *kriya*. *Yoga* means yoga and youre going to find out what it means if you don't already know.

Tapas means burning, on fire. *Sva* means self – *adhyaya* means enquiry, investigation. You could say knowledge but that is a bit object based. Enquiry is more process based. You could say awareness but that is a little on the passive side. But all are ok, it depends on the context. *Ishvarapranidana* is a little bit more tricky. It is anyway made up of two words. *Pranidana* means realignment or finding the line. And *ishvara* means the choice making or maker.

Now, everything I have to say about yoga, about Patanjali, about sanskrit, is just a matter of opinion. This is at the very heart of the Yoga sutras. That all knowledge, all mental activity is interpretation, representation, projection. It is not truth. I don't mean legal truth, where were you on Wednesday, not that kind of truth. But the truth that we are all probably interested in: what's really going on? Who am I really? What is the meaning of life. The truth of all that. You must also always remember this. That out of this mouth can never come the truth. So let the ears not think they are hearing the truth: or falsehood. Out of any mouth can only come an interpretation, according to that mouth's own prejudice. It's not possible to be free from prejudice, it's not possible to be free from your past experience and how that has conditioned you to see, to think and to feel.

Nevertheless I have tried to navigate my prejudices and preferences as honestly and openly as possible to get as close as I can to what Patanjali might really mean. Not what godfrey would like him to mean. I have done this based on my own experience. I am not a dictionary scholar. I am not any kind of scholar and have no desire or pretension to be. I am simply fascinated by human life, and especially the relationship between suffering, perception and action. So in all honesty I don't care what the book scholars have to say. The translation I would give to Patanjali's definition of yoga is: the activity of yoga is passionate enquiry into the source of personal action. Don't forget that action is always predicated on some kind of choice or selection, even if it is only occurring in the autonomic nerves.

Patanjali doesn't say what that action or choice should be. He doesn't make any evaluation of any kind of action or choice as good or bad, right or wrong, effective or ineffective. His one qualification is of the process itself. That it

have eight aspects, or eight limbs: which is *ashtanga*. So Patanjali says the process of yoga is “passionate enquiry into the source of personal action” and that this process has eight limbs. These eight limbs are: *yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi*. And that is all he really has to say about yoga, the rest is an explanation of what happens when you go into it, and how that happens. What is revealed when you investigate the source of personal action.

The most practical, the most technical that Patanjali gets is in the second sutra that he uses to define *asana*, the third limb of yoga, when he says “*prayatna saithilya*” which means release of tension, or relaxation of effort. In other words what patanjali is saying is that this enquiry into the nature of personal action takes place through and by releasing tension. In order that the bodimind can establish itself in what he calls “*shtiramsukham*”. Which externally means “comfortable stability” but more enticingly “edgeless bliss”.

Establish means something quite specific. It does not mean “make”, “fabricate” “bring about”. Patanjali doesn’t say yoga is to fabricate a body immune to death as is said in the Hatha Yoga texts. He doesn’t say that yoga is to make the body immune to disease. He doesn’t say that yoga is to make anything happen. He says that yoga is to investigate how things are. To enquire into how things happen. This misunderstanding of Patanjali is where most of the misconceptions about yoga come from. If you are carrying these misconceptions into your yoga practise you have to pay a very, very heavy price. Not so much in your practise itself but in your life. If you think that yoga is about making something happen: if you think that yoga is about making your mind become still or pure, or your body become flexible or strong, you are already head down deep in the shit that masquerades as spirituality.

So right now I’m just asking you to suspend any assumption you might have that through your practise you should be making something happen, and just relax about it all. Instead consider the possibility that Patanjali might have been saying something of value when he said that yoga is an enquiry. An enquiry is not a factory. It is not fabrication of some preconceived objective. Yoga is enquiry into the source of personal action. Why the source of

personal action? Of course you could enquire into the source of any action, except you don't know enough about anybody else's actions: except how they effect you. But hypothetically, you should have a little bit more information about your own actions. I know that whenever you smile at me it's because you like me and you think I'm dead cool: well, that's bollocks isn't it. You smile at me sometimes because you don't want me to know that you're not happy with me. There is no point me investigating your actions to find out what's really going on.

For this enquiry to bear fruit, for it's eight limbs to unfold, only one practical concern is required: deep relaxation. So this is what you should be doing with yoga posture practice. You should not be concerned with how flexible you are, you should not be concerned with how strong you are. That doesn't mean you are not aware of how flexible you are. That doesn't mean you are not aware of how strong you are. But it means you're not trying to get stronger, and you're not trying to make yourself more flexible. You're just trying to become relaxed: which may well be a contradiction in terms.

If you use your body safely and effectively in your practice then you will become stronger and more flexible: up to your genetic limit and relative to how much you practice. Some people can become very, very flexible and some people can not. There is a genetic determinate inside everybody which creates a limit. But there are other determinates that come into play long before that like age, time, circumstance, passion. If you don't have much desire you aren't going to go very far. The journey of yoga is not about flexibility and strength. It is about relaxation. It is about freedom from any kind of tension: and that's all. Because that's all Patanjali points to as a physical condition: freedom from tension.

This can be very easy to hear and accept conceptually but that does not mean it is easy to apply to practice. Especially when your blindness is being led by other people's blindness, which is usually the case. So you have people like me who think, "right I'll put a photograph of me doing the most far out fucking posture when I look really sexy on the beach and then everybody is going to think that I'm really dead fuckin' cool, and then they will think if they give me enough money they'll end up being as dead fuckin' cool as me". This

is called the blind leading the blind, so you have to watch out. If you select a yoga teacher on the basis of their physical capacity, or the size of their bank account or smile, you haven't done yourself a single favour. Actually if your yoga teachers have exposed themselves only through their physical capacity you can be pretty sure you've done yourself a disfavour.

It is possible to develop flexibility on top of tension. Very often the development of flexibility is the creation of tension elsewhere: deeper, more subtle tension. So actually flexibility has got nothing to do with yoga. Luckily Paul is here so I don't have to do what I normally do which is talk about him behind his back. Paul is not particularly flexible. Paul doesn't need to be particularly flexible for his life as a jockey and horse trainer. In fact when he first came here he was the least flexible person in the room. He's nodding his head in agreement. And yet on day three or four when I explained what Patanjali says results from freeing the body from tension, Paul said "I know that". He didn't need to be flexible to know what Patanjali was talking about. In order to have felt it in his body in the postures he just needed to enquire into the nature of his own tension. In that enquiry he became free from the tensions that still exists in his body.

To be physically gifted, to have a well developed physical capacity, can be a great dis-advantage in yoga because you can take your movement, your actions and their source for granted. Whereas when you're stiff and limited in your capacity, your limitations bring you into focus on what is actually happening: which is resistance. So I would honestly say that physical limitation is a gift to yoga practice when yoga is effectively understood. If yoga is understood to be about maximum strength and flexibility, stamina or whatever: then no. But Patanjali says nothing about that. The fact that some contemporary chancer with a fine line in book marketing, like me for example, might do so, has nothing to do with yoga. So right now all I'm really trying to do is to challenge the assumption that flexibility has got anything significant to do with yoga. But more subtly, under that, I'm also trying to challenge the assumption that yoga is about making anything happen.

More than the result of what you're doing, the emphasis I'm trying to give you is on what it is that you are actually doing. On how it is that you are going

about that which you are doing. But even more than that the emphasis is simply on recognising that which is actually happening. Within you: because yoga is the passionate investigation of the source of personal action. And that means no matter what you're doing, yoga, enquiry, can take place. Not just on your mat. It means that at any point in your life you can be doing yoga; provided what you're doing is not increasing tension. Providing what you're doing allows you to be relaxed enough to be sensitive to what's actually happening in your body, so that through that investigation it might relax enough to invite the mind to relax too. And then you can investigate that actuality as deeply as possible. From that investigation all of the fruits of yoga come.

As you all know yoga brings enlightenment, liberation, self-realisation, freedom. These are all big heavy words which are carried around in the minds of most people without the slightest idea of what they mean. Hedged in with all kinds of assumptions that do one thing only: create anxiety. Creating judgement: "still not enlightened? After all this time. Still not at peace?" What does patanjali have to say about the fruits of yoga? His last, defining statement on the fruits of yoga is "consciousness-energy is established as the true nature of the self". He qualifies this by saying that it comes when we are no longer caught by the play of appearance that is the world. To be caught by the play in the mind means to assume that it is accurate, or true. To be free from it is to know that it is a conditioned representation that is not worth killing or dying for.

He doesn't say that the tax man will not come calling anymore or that you will be free of financial obligation. Nor does he say that your wedding vows become null and void. Nor does he say that your children no longer need taking care of. He doesn't say that life stops. Although some people think he does and that at the end of the yoga sutras he says "your body and the entire universe will dissolve back into that from which it came." How terrible you must feel if you think that somebody once dissolved their body and the entire universe and then came back to write about it. He doesn't say any such thing. That's a projection of confused and anxious fools who are unwilling to trust their own experience in the face of thousands of years of exaggeration and metaphor.

What Patanjali meant by “establishes itself” is not that you have made the self become consciousness energy. It’s not that you’ve made anything happen. It’s that you’ve recognised that it is constantly like that. You’ve finally recognised what’s actually going on. So this is an epistemological transformation, it is not an ontological transformation: absolutely nothing concrete changes. Your body doesn’t become something else, your mind doesn’t become something else, you self doesn’t become something else. The true nature of the self just become indubitably obvious: and then you carry on with your life almost exactly as before: but not quite. The the actions you take are the same kind of actions. The motivation for those actions are the same kind of motivations. The consequences of those actions are the same kind of consequences. Yet they all come with a delicious transparency that makes them hard to kill or die for.

Despite what the Hatha Yogis may say, it is not possible for you to drink poison and not die: unless you have immunised yourself with that very poison. Unless you have been drinking that poison incrementally for years. If you drink poison you will die, this is the nature of cause and effect. You can not escape from conditioning, you can not escape from karma. But karma can become irrelevant to your happiness. Karma can become irrelevant to your satisfaction, to your appreciation of life. In other words life can be appreciated no matter what it’s specific circumstances. For us as spoilt westerners this might be difficult to conceive. But you only have to go to india, to the edge of a big town where you’ll find families living under less canvas than it took to make that door and you see how happy they are, how delighted they are, how alive they are, how much joy they have in their movement and their relationships: and they have absolutely nothing. They do not even have tomorrow. They don’t know if they’ll be eating, or even alive, tomorrow.

So this is what yoga is pointing to. You do not need to establish some kind of special circumstances. Not in your body relative to flexibility. Not in your mind relative to concentration, understanding, knowledge. This is all irrelevant to yoga. It’s not totally irrelevant to life. But it’s totally irrelevant to yoga. What is relevant to yoga is simply that you be enquiring passionately into the source of personal action. This enquiry has to begin in the impact of personal action,

not it's source. You can't go straight to the source just because you want to. You have to feel the impact of your actions and then you have to follow the thread from the impact through the motivation through the impulses back to the source.