

The Yoga Sutras are a map of the human condition revealing its deepest possibility. A map is valuable and meaningful only on being put to use. One must be on the mapped terrain to understand the symbols being used. It is therefore not possible to understand the Yoga Sutras without becoming intimate with the relationship between experience, cognition, perception and consciousness: at the heart of which is the sense of an independent, autonomous self. Without a clear understanding of their relationship, which is nothing other than the dynamic through which the world becomes manifest, Patanjali will remain unintelligible, and life disconcerting. This understanding comes only from deep, direct experience of the dynamics generating mental activity. Elucidation of these dynamics is the subject matter of the Yoga Sutras, and constitutes the central thread weaving the whole into a single unity. This thread unravels step by step the deceptions of mind that obscure the intelligence and wisdom of consciousness leaving us vulnerable in our seemingly unshakable sense of separateness and isolation.

Any attempt to map the territory of consciousness in the coordinates of words is bound by both the linguistic capacity and the experiential insights of the cartographer. Any attempt to use the map also. The symbols that Patanjali uses to lead us through this territory are of course words. He uses words only as signposts and not as a means to define. Looking to the Yoga Sutras for an explanation or even a detailed description of reality is an invitation to confusion and self-deception. The power and significance of the Yoga Sutras rests on its relevance to the experience of being human, rather than its accuracy as a description or explanation of reality. Anyone looking for a handbook for life will be sorely disappointed, or find nothing more than dishonest confirmation of their own prejudices. If you have enough inner experience the Yoga Sutras can help you to find your way further in, using them to clarify and guide your own enquiry. Clarification for the meaning I give to Patanjali's words can only be found within a deep exploration of your own bodimind where the subtleties of sensation, thought, perception and consciousness are revealed.

The subtleties of cognition, perception and consciousness combined with the technical inclination of Patanjali's mind means that any interpretation of the Yoga Sutras cannot effectively or honestly avoid an equivalent technicality. This does not have to make it dull or difficult. After all Patanjali is only talking of things that constitute the foundation of our experience. It is only because this foundation is not usually explored that the Yoga Sutras can seem to be difficult or dull. There is nothing about your life that can not be cast into a more clear light by the understanding they contain. To approach Patanjali as if he is impossible to understand or relate to, as he has been made to by many, is to deny yourself an invaluable guide to the human condition. Yet it would be naïve to think that two thousand years of collective human enquiry could not add to the knowledge available to Patanjali, even if only by way of clarification. Yet this in no way diminishes his achievements, nor the validity of the map that he left behind. Its value lies in our ability to make use of it for the benefit of our own experience.

The Yoga Sutras have no direct equivalent in Western culture. Yoga is one of the six Darshana of Indian culture, and its sole textual basis is the Yoga Sutras. Written in a language that has not been used in speech for many generations, even translating it, let alone interpreting it, presents almost insurmountable obstacles. Overcoming these obstacles depends more on familiarity with the subject matter than on scholarship, not least because many of the key words used by Patanjali can have many different and even conflicting meanings. There is therefore endless contention amongst scholars as to the meaning, significance and relevance of the Yoga Sutras as a whole, and many individual sutras and even words. Too often commentators have relied on the interpretations of others, rather than on their own inner experience. Of course it is not possible to have deep and illuminating experience of the inner humanscape without a deep commitment to meditation. It is only in the silent stillness of the meditative mind that what Patanjali is talking about can become clear. On the basis of my own experience of almost 40 years of meditation, on cushion and mat, I find a unitary thread of clear sense running all the way through the text. One that spirals in on itself in much the same way that the light of awareness does as mind becomes more and more quiet.

The Yoga Sutras are not a religious treatise in the way that the Vedas, the Bible or the Koran are. They contain no creed or liturgy, hymns nor psalms. Nevertheless they point to the inner source and fruition of the religious impulse. Yet despite arising in the most religious of all cultures there is not a

single direct reference to a divine incarnation. There is no mention of Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva: nor of Krishna, Rama, Radha, Parvati, Kali or Durga. Ishvara, however, figures significantly, not least in Patanjali's definition of yoga as a process. What this word actually signifies in Patanjali's use may well not be what it is usually taken to mean.

The Yoga Sutras are not a scientific, moral or philosophical treatise and Patanjali is not an exponent of Samkhya: He is something much more helpful and valuable than any of those: a cartographer of the human experience who is as precise and economical in his choice and arrangement of words as any master poet. You can be sure that none of his words, nor their arrangement or use, is arbitrary or random. Rather that he means exactly what he says, including any and all of his apparent ambiguities. Ambiguities that dissolve as we become intimate with the intrinsic uncertainties to which they refer and find ourselves in the "awesome lucid uncertainty" of deep, clear seeing.

That Patanjali is not a 'Samkhyist' is quite clear from a reading of the original text in sanskrit that clarifies his use of the central concepts of samkhya: 'Prakriti' and 'Purusha'. Never does he juxtapose them as the arguments of Samkhya do. Instead he uses them to point to distinct aspects of the human experience and its overt dualities of this and that, self and other; rather than to define reality in absolute and dualistic terms. Moreover he never even uses them in the same or adjacent sutras. Most significantly perhaps, Patanjali does not use both terms in the very last sutra where he very easily could have done. Instead he uses the term 'gunam' which refers to the fundamental dynamic of prakriti rather than 'prakriti' itself. This was certainly no accident.

Yoga is not a simple word, and that to which it points is deep, subtle and multifaceted. To those who practice yoga in any of its many forms it is first and foremost a practice. Although these practices, depending on what they are, have many effects, they also all share a common purpose or destination: Yoga as a being state. This is actually very rarely reached. Yet it is usually done so by way of awareness states that we encounter in and through our practice, six of which are labelled by Patanjali as: asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. Yet each one of these has different aspects or component elements, none of which are static or fixed. Many of these states happen spontaneously outside of our practice when we are totally relaxed. We slip out of the structure of the social and cultural persona with which we are normally identified and into the delight and satisfaction of more subtle 'egoless' states of consciousness. These awareness states can do more than delight and nourish. If we enter them in complete lucidity they can provide insights into the mechanisms that usually keep us identified with the transient intensities of our superficial experiences. This is the purpose of yoga practices.

The being state of Yoga has been given many names, even in other traditions and cultures. They all point to the deepest possibility of being human within which all longing and anxiety have vanished to be replaced by a deep satisfaction and contentment that expresses itself in many different ways. Many are the qualities traditionally associated with this possibility: compassion, fearlessness, playfulness, wisdom, peace, silence, spontaneity. Yet these qualities, which are not so hard to temporarily pretend to, are not things we need to learn. They are direct expressions of human nature unrestricted by distorting cultural conditioning. Yoga the being state is our natural, fundamental state as lucid, sensitive and intelligent beings. As social and cultural beings our expressions of this state are shaped and limited by the society and culture in which we have been conditioned. Sufis, Taoists, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Occultists and others have found and been lived from this fundamental being state. Each tradition offers us different terminology, references and techniques for accessing and understanding it. Whether we call it enlightenment, illumination, absorption, liberation, salvation or Yoga what is important is our experience.

Yet the practices of yoga neither cause nor lead directly to Yoga the being state. All they can do is reveal its existence and nature. Yet revelation is not enough for Yoga to become our functional disposition as a being state. We need to see so clearly into the mechanisms that hold it at bay that they start to dissolve. Only when these mechanisms have completely dissolved does Yoga become more than a temporary awareness state and saturate our experience as a being state.

There are two fundamental and deeply interlinked mechanisms by which we obscure the ground of our being and cling to the sense of personal self convinced that we are functioning independently and autonomously in the vast otherness of existence. These two mechanisms are the dynamics of identification, and the dynamics of perception upon which it rests. It is necessary to distinguish between these two interwoven layers of mental activity that lie at the root of our sense of isolated self, for only one of them can and must be relinquished. We need perception in order to act and think, we do not need identity except perhaps as a cloak we put on to ease our passage through the world. In the privacy of our own solitude and silence we have no need of identification, but we still have need of perception. Yet these two dynamics are deeply entangled. They need to untangle if we are to enjoy the deepest human possibilities. This disentanglement, like so much else, is not something that we must or can actually do. It only happens as a result of deep, clear seeing. If our practice does not provide this depth and clarity we will never enjoy the being state of Yoga.

There are in effect four yogas to which Patanjali refers. Yoga the ground of awareness and existence; Yoga the state of being lived from that ground enjoying the natural wisdom of nondual awareness; yoga the awareness state of temporarily experiencing that ground and its nonduality with everyday experience; yoga the process of letting go of the internal dynamics which obscure that ground and its relationship to everyday experience. Likewise many are the techniques and practices that have been and are used in the name of yoga. Though most of them may be beneficial physically, emotionally, cognitively or behaviourally, few of them actually lead to the liberation of kaivalya. Instead they simply reinforce the subtle underpinnings of the sense of self and feed its need for continuously renewed satisfaction.

In the first book of the Yoga Sutras, Samadhi-pada, Patanjali focuses on cognitive dynamics, their relationship to the sense of self and how they are unravelled in samadhi. He characterises Yoga as surrender, rather than a process of action or doing. It is the letting go of all doing and intention that allows Yoga to reveal itself without any knowledge or skill required. The technical bent of Patanjali's mind, within which it is only too easy to become lost, is revealed from the beginning in his presentation of the perceptual underpinnings to the sense of self. This is emphasised again in his analysis of the cognitive deconstruction that takes place in and as samadhi. However it is of course possible, and probably more usual, to encounter all the depths and subtleties of cognition, perception and awareness without being left with a clear conceptualisation of their relationships, but nevertheless having benefited from their liberating power. In Samadhi-pada Patanjali is presenting yoga as an awareness state.

In the second book, Sadhana-pada, Patanjali presents yoga as practice, but, wisely, without offering any specific techniques or practices. He begins by analysing the dynamics of identification. This is then linked to cognitive dynamics by way of the suffering they cause. He finishes with an analysis of the five 'external' limbs of yoga as an infolding of awareness. This infolding is a deep and liberating encounter with that which actually is (sadhana). An encounter that takes place through the three aspects of intimacy: rupanugamat (connecting with), samapatti (merging with) and paridrishta (seeing through).

In the third book, Vibhuti-pada, Patanjali explores the depths and subtleties of the meditative mind, with a special emphasis on the seventh limb, dhyana. His analysis of its liberating illuminations is followed by a taxonomy of meditative possibilities that is neither exhaustive in its content nor its scope. Rather it is a brief quantification of the depth and breadth of possibilities opened up by becoming intimate with cognition, perception and consciousness. Much of this is presented in contentious esoteric terminology that has caused widespread confusion. It is a presentation of yoga as the natural wisdom of consciousness.

In the fourth book, Kaivalya-pada, Patanjali delivers a summarising account of the nature of consciousness and its implications for human experience. Kaivalya (otherlessness) is the final fruit of yoga within which no sense of self or other, however subtle, remains. It is not a state of consciousness but an organic disposition of freedom and spontaneity within which the natural and wholesome intelligence of nondual awareness functions without prejudice, but through the perceptual and

cognitive conditioning of a particular human life. It is a presentation of Yoga as a being state of freedom.

Running as a unifying thread through the four books of the Yoga Sutras is a clear insight into the relationship between the conscious and unconscious mind. Almost all our past actions and experiences have left psychosomatic imprints in and as our unconscious. Individual subliminal impressions are left over from experiences that remained unresolved because attention was turned away from them either by fear or habit. Each of these impressions contains the repressed charge of energy that brought it into the bodimind in the first place, itching for release. This is why it is so hard to sit down and enjoy a quiet mind, even when life as it is now is not particularly troublesome. Patanjali presents a discrete and concrete way of becoming free from their unconscious power, by mobilising the natural intelligence of consciousness. This mobilisation brings us back into direct contact with the flow of life, closing the space between observer and observed in a dynamic intimacy within which the sense of other and self dissolves. This intimacy begins as we relax fully into the presence of a perceived object. Its apparent form totally engages our attention in and as 'rupanugamat'. As the 'object' saturates awareness the cognitive split between subject and object closes in the dynamic lucidity of 'samapatti'. This lucid but nondiscursive intimacy allows 'paridrishta' to reveal what is apparently happening (causal actions linking independent objects) to what actually is (consciousness in movement) via what is actually happening (mind projecting onto the flow of consciousness).

The breadth and depth of human intelligence has rarely been recognised, and even less rarely used. It is not enough to follow the thread of rational argument whereby the illusory natures of time, space, causality, volition and the self are explained. We need to experience that for ourselves in the unclouded lucidity of conscious awareness. This depends on a clear and radical shift from discursive thinking into the natural intelligence of awareness. This shift is always and only a function of deep relaxation, and never of effort or skill. Only when we are totally free from any impulse to control, direct, achieve or know can genuine intimacy happen. When it does we will be taken through the illuminate darkness of lucid uncertainty into the abundant emptiness that is consciousness pulsating as the heart of all phenomena.