

# YOGA SŪTRAS OF PATAÑJALI & ITS COMMENTARIES

Edwin Bryant's translation of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* with commentary aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on classical Yoga by providing insights from all the traditional Sanskrit commentators on the text. His translation is forthcoming in the Oxford World Classics series.

EDWIN F. BRYANT



## CHAPTER I

### Samādhīpāda

The Section on Samādhī,  
Meditative Trance.

AS IS STANDARD PROTOCOL, ALL traditional commentators begin their commentaries on Patañjali's text with an invocation to their worshipable deities, soliciting their blessings and inspiration for the enterprise they are about to undertake. Vyāsa invokes Kṛṣṇa with the famous mantra: *Om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya* [I offer obeisances to God, Vāsudeva (Kṛṣṇa)].<sup>1</sup> He then offers obeisances to Patañjali, the author of the text.

अथ योगानुशासनम् ॥१॥

1.2 Atha yogānuśāsanam.

*Atha*, now; *Yoga*, the teachings of Yoga; *anusāsanam*, teachings.

Now, the teachings of Yoga [are presented].

Following the convention in philosophical exposition, Patañjali uses the first verse to announce the topic of his teachings: the primary subject matter of his text differs from that of other schools in so far as his work will be about Yoga.<sup>2</sup> The commentators, assuming a basis of knowledge in their readership,

elaborate on the meaning of Yoga at length, presenting a synopsis of the entire text in their commentaries on the very first verse. We will proceed more gradually, but will maintain the Sanskrit forms for the dozen or so most important terms that will reoccur repeatedly throughout this text since these do not all translate well into English; the reader is advised to become familiar with them.

Vyāsa, the first and principal commentator of Patañjali, whose commentary has attained a quasi-canonical status of its own, glosses Yoga with samādhī, the ultimate contemplative state. The various stages of samādhī, as the primary subject matter of the Yoga Sūtras, will be discussed in detail in this work. Vyāsa states that the mind, referred to as citta in Yogic terminology, undergoes five different states: wondering, confused, distracted, concentrated and restrained. The last two states are of interest to Vyāsa in his definition of Yoga; when the citta is restrained and concentrated, or fixed exclusively on one point without deviation, a type of samādhī known as samprajñāta is attained, the various stages of which will be discussed in detail in the following verses.<sup>3</sup> Samprajñāta samādhī

leads to the ultimate goal of Yoga, asamprajñāta samādhī. This higher samādhī is the realization of puruṣa, the true self and source of pure awareness that lies behind the citta mind, and thus behind all cognitive functions whatsoever, including that of concentration. Vyāsa thus wastes no time in introducing his readers to the primary subject matter of Patañjali's text, and prepares them for the detailed discussion that lies ahead.

Vyāsa makes a point of noting that a distracted mind, the third on his list of states of citta, is not to be confounded with Yoga. Vācaspatimiśra, the second oldest commentator after Vyāsa, elaborates that while it is obvious that the other two states of mind, wondering and forgetfulness, are not Yoga, a distracted state of mind may appear to be so because it is, on occasion, fixed. However, such steadiness immediately relapses into wondering and forgetfulness, hence it cannot be considered real Yoga. Only the fully concentrated, or one-pointed state of mind, is true Yoga (most practitioners of Yoga come under the category of "distracted," says the commentator Hariharānanda Āraṇya). Vācaspatimiśra traces the etymology of the root *yuj*, the verbal

<sup>1</sup>The term used for God here, Bhagavān, is the same term used in the Bhagavad Gīta, spoken by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna, and in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the story of Kṛṣṇa's incarnation. The term used for Kṛṣṇa is Vāsudeva, a patronymic for Kṛṣṇa as son of Vāsudeva.

<sup>2</sup>The first verse of the Vedānta Sūtra, an authoritative text from another of the six orthodox schools of philosophy, is, as a point of comparison: *athāto brahmajijñāsā*, now there is inquiry about brahman, the absolute truth.

<sup>3</sup>Looking ahead to the discussion that is to come further on in this section, Vyāsa defines *samprajñāta samādhī* as when the object of concentration "shines forth in its true nature." In other words, the mind is focused exclusively in an object with no distractions, and with such a focus that the subtle qualities of the object can be perceived without interference.

base of the term Yoga (cognate with the English “yoke”), to one of its meanings, “to contemplate.”

ALTHOUGH YOGA IS ONE OF SIX schools of orthodox Hindu thought, its adherents naturally consider it to supersede the other schools. Vijñānabhikṣu, the most philosophical of the commentators, quotes a number of scriptural passages that point to the supremacy of Yoga, such as Kṛṣṇa’s statements in the Bhagavad Gītā: “*The yogi is higher than the ascetic, and also considered higher than those who pursue knowledge. The yogi is higher still than those who perform action; therefore, Arjuna, become a yogi*” (6.46). Just as all rivers, such as the Gaṅgā, are present as parts of the ocean, says Vijñānabhikṣu, so all other schools of thought are fully represented as parts of Yoga. While he allows that one can certainly obtain genuine knowledge from these other schools, as will become clear from the forthcoming discussions, all knowledge is, by its very nature, a faculty of buddhi, the intellect. Buddhi is the discriminatory aspect and highest feature of the citta mind. We must always bear in mind, when reading this text, that all aspects of citta, in Yoga psychology, are external to or distinct from the true self, puruṣa. As will become clearer in the verses that follow, puruṣa is autonomous, and lies behind all forms of thought.

To fully grasp this essential point, one must note that just as the body is commonly accepted to be extraneous to the soul and discarded at death by most religious systems, so (in contrast to certain major strains of Western thought), the mind is also held to be extraneous to the soul in Yoga, and discarded at the time of liberation. The puruṣa soul is enveloped in two extraneous

“bodies” in Yoga metaphysics: the gross material body, consisting of the senses, and the subtle body, consisting of the citta and other subtle elements.<sup>4</sup> At death, the soul discards the gross body, which returns to the material elements, but remains encapsulated in the subtle body, and is eventually projected into a new gross body along with the citta from the previous birth, in accordance with laws of karma, etc. which will be discussed later in the text. In order to be liberated from the cycle of repeated birth and death, the soul has to free itself from not just the gross body, but the subtle body of the citta as well. The process of Yoga is directed towards this end. For our present purposes, then, knowledge, as a feature of buddhi, the discriminatory aspect of citta, is extraneous to the pure self, and thus not the ultimate aspect of reality.

Therefore, while knowledge is initially essential in leading the yogi practitioner through the various levels of samprajñāta samādhi, it is only through Yoga, for Vijñānabhikṣu, that one can transcend buddhi itself, and thus the base of knowledge, to arrive at puruṣa, the ultimate state of pure, unconditioned awareness. Just as a person with a torch in hand gives up the torch upon finding treasure, says Vijñānabhikṣu, so eventually, buddhi, the intellect, and the knowledge that it presents, also become redundant upon attaining the ultimate source of truth, puruṣa, the self. The self is pure subjectivity, and transcends all knowledge, which is of the nature of objectivity. Thus, he says, knowledge and samprajñāta samādhi are the door and doorkeeper, and both lead the practitioner from the domain of buddhi to the highest goal of existence, realization of puruṣa, which lies beyond even buddhi. This state is termed asamprajñāta samādhi, and it is

this that is the ultimate goal for the school of Yoga.

THE ORIGINS OF YOGA ARE ROOTED in direct perception of its subject matter, says Hariharānanda Āraṇya. He too notes that Yoga is not based on mere logical reasoning, but on direct experience, and in this regard differs from the other five schools of orthodox thought, which are highly philosophical. Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras are more a psychosomatic technique than a treatise on metaphysics; the truths of Yoga cannot be established by inferential reasoning, but only by direct perception. These personal realizations, says Hariharānanda Āraṇya, are handed down from generation to generation. The teachings of Yoga are an attempt at encapsulating those truths as best as possible through the medium of words and concepts. Since the ultimate truth of puruṣa, attained in asamprajñāta samādhi, is by definition, beyond the intellect, and thus words and concepts, the primary purpose of this text is, as far as possible, to point the reader towards the actual practice of Yoga. While the Yoga Sūtras provide much interesting information on the nature of Hindu psychology and soteriology, its intended function is as a manual for the practitioner.

As an aside, Vācaspatimiśra notes that the term anuśāsanam in this verse means strictly speaking “further teaching.”<sup>5</sup> He also points out that the sacred texts state that an earlier sage known as Hiraṇyagarbha was the original teacher of Yoga, hence Patañjali is using the verb anuśāsanam, “further teachings.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, Patañjali is not the founder of the practice of Yoga, which Vācaspatimiśra wishes to stress is an ancient practice that preceded even Patañjali.

<sup>4</sup>These two bodies are also referred to as sthūla śarīra and sūkṣma śarīra respectively.

<sup>5</sup>Śāsanam means teaching, and the prefix anu- means “further.”

<sup>6</sup>Yājñavalkya smṛti.

## योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥२॥

### 1.2 Yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ

*Yoga*, Yoga; *citta*, the mind; *vṛtti*, fluctuation, state; *nirodha*, restraint, control.

Yoga is the control of the changing states of the mind.

THE COMMENTATORS HAVE packed an enormous amount of rather dense information into their commentaries on this verse, since Patañjali has basically summarized the process of Yoga here. The task of summarizing this discussion is complicated somewhat since the commentators presuppose that their readers are aware of the system of Sāṃkhya, one of the other six schools of orthodox Indian thought with which the Yoga school is coupled.<sup>7</sup> A brief outline of aspects of this system relevant to the verse is provided here, but the serious reader of Patañjali is advised to undertake a thorough study of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, as a clear grasp of this is required for an understanding of Patañjali's text. Once the basics are grasped, the teachings of Yoga will become progressively clearer as one advances through the text.

In the Sāṃkhya (literally "numeration") system, reality is perceived as the product of two distinct ontological categories: prakṛti, or the primordial material matrix of the physical universe, and puruṣa, the conscious innermost self. As a result of the contact between these two entities, the material universe evolves in a sequential fashion out of prakṛti. The first and subtlest evolutes from prakṛti according to Sāṃkhya are, in order: buddhi, intelligence; ahaṃkāra, ego; and manas, mind. These constitute

the "inner" life of an individual.<sup>8</sup> The term citta is used in this verse and throughout the text by Patañjali and the commentators to refer to all three of these cognitive functions combined. Buddhi, intelligence, is the aspect of citta that produces, among other things, the functions of judgment, discrimination, knowledge, ascertainment, will, virtue and detachment. Ahaṃkāra, or ego, produces the function of self-awareness, self-identity and self-conceit (the personal pronoun aham means "I," and kāra, "the doer").<sup>9</sup> This is the aspect of citta that causes the sense of "I-ness," "I know," "I shall hear," "I doubt," "I am happy," etc. Manas, the mind, is the aspect of citta that engages in the functions of thinking, feeling, desiring, willing, organizing sensory input and directing the senses. It is the bridge between the world of the senses with their sense objects, and buddhi and ahaṃkāra.

I WILL RETAIN THE SANSKRIT WORD citta, throughout this discussion, and gloss it with the term "mind" for ease of reference, since this is how it is usually translated, but it should be kept in mind that the term encapsulates all of the psychic functions outlined above, and not just that of manas, which is also usually translated by the term "mind." The vṛttis indicated by Patañjali in this verse refer to any permutation of citta, in other words, any thought, idea or cognitive act performed by either the buddhi, ahaṃkāra or manas. Since all aspects of citta are prakṛti, matter, and completely distinct from the true self, puruṣa, Patañjali states in this verse that all vṛttis must be controlled in order for the puruṣa to be realized by the yogi

as an autonomous entity distinct from the mind.

Since puruṣa in its pure state is considered to be free of content and changeless – it does not transform and undergo permutations in the way the citta constantly does – the commentator Vijñānabhikṣu raises the issue as to how it can be aware of objects at all in the first place. This awareness is brought about by means of buddhi, intelligence. Buddhi is the discriminatory aspect of citta, and the first interface between puruṣa and the external world. The sense objects provide images which are received through the senses, sorted by the manas, the thinking and organizing aspect of citta, and presented to buddhi. Although inanimate, buddhi molds itself into the form and shape of these objects of experience, thoughts and ideas. Vijñānabhikṣu compares this process to liquid copper being poured into a mold and taking the exact shape of the mold. These thoughts and ideas are the vṛttis referred to by Patañjali in this verse.

Due to contingency, the pure consciousness of puruṣa shines onto buddhi and animates it with consciousness, like a lamp illuminates a dull inanimate object with light. Just as light bounces off an object back to its source, the consciousness of puruṣa is reflected off buddhi back to puruṣa. Puruṣa thus becomes conscious of its reflection in the animated buddhi, which the commentators compare to a mirror. However, since buddhi is constantly being transformed by the images presented to it by the mind and senses, this reflection is obscured and distorted by vṛttis, just as one's reflection in a mirror is perverted if the mirror is dirty

<sup>7</sup>The difference between the two schools is primarily one of focus. Both accept the liberation of puruṣa, the inner self, from prakṛti, matter, as their goal, but Sāṃkhya mostly concerns itself with analyzing what puruṣa must extricate itself from, namely the manifestations of prakṛti, and Yoga, with the means by which puruṣa can attain such liberation, namely, the psychosomatic process of Yoga.

<sup>8</sup>These are known as the antaḥkaraṇa.

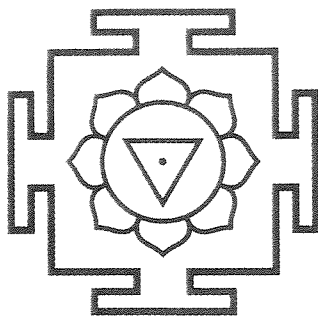
<sup>9</sup>Ahaṃkāra is referred to as asmitā in this text.

or warped. Mistaking this distorted reflection to be its real self, puruṣa becomes connected to the world of change through the vṛttis, just as one may look at one's reflection in a dirty mirror and mistakenly think that one is dirty. Thus, the puruṣa undergoes the experiences of the body and mind – birth, death, disease, old age, happiness, distress, peacefulness and anxiety, etc. Yoga involves preventing citta from being molded into the vṛttis, the objects and thoughts of the world.

**A**N UNDERSTANDING OF THIS process requires the introduction of a new set of terms: the three *guṇas*, literally “strands” or “qualities.” These are: *sattva*, “lucidity;” *rajas*, “action;” and *tamas*, “inertia.” These *guṇas* are mentioned frequently by the commentators, and are pivotal to an understanding of Yoga meditation in this text; they thus require some attention. The *guṇas* are inherent in prakṛti, and are the catalysts in the evolution of the citta and all manifest reality from prakṛti noted above. Just as threads are inherent in the production of a rope, says Vijñānabhikṣu, so the *guṇas* underpin and permeate prakṛti. Since everything evolves from prakṛti, the *guṇas* are present in varying proportions in all manifest reality, just as the three primary colors are present in all other colors. For our present purposes, the commentator Vyāsa notes that the citta mind, as a product of prakṛti, also consists of the three *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*.

The *guṇas* are usually portrayed, and perhaps most easily understood, by their psychological manifestations. Amongst a number of things, *sattva*, the purest of the *guṇas* when manifested in the mind, is typically characterized by lucidity, tranquillity, wisdom, discrimination, detachment, happiness, and

peacefulness; *rajas*, by hankering, energetic endeavor, power, restlessness and creative activity; and *tamas*, the *guṇa* least favorable for meditation, by ignorance, delusion, disinterest, lethargy, sleep and disinclination towards constructive



activity. The Bhagavad Gītā (chapters 14, 17 and 18) presents a wide range of symptoms connected with each of these three *guṇas*.<sup>10</sup> Kṛṣṇa makes the useful observation that the *guṇas* are in continual tension with each other, one *guṇa* becoming prominent in an individual for a while and suppressing the others, only to become dominated in turn by the emergence of one of the other *guṇas* (Bhagavad Gītā 14.10).

One of the goals of Yoga meditation is to maximize the presence of the *guṇa* of *sattva* in the citta and eliminate that of *rajas* and *tamas*. The etymological meaning of the term *sattva* is “the nature of being,” or material reality in its purest state. This state is characterized by discrimination, lucidity and illumination, since prakṛti is revealed for what it is before *rajas* and *tamas* cause it to transform. It is *rajas* and *tamas* that are the most active influences in the production of the vṛttis, the changing states of the citta mind, by disrupting its placid and lucid aspect of *sattva*. Vyāsa states that when *rajas* and *tamas* become activated, the citta mind is attracted to thoughts of the sense objects. When the mind is overcome primarily by *tamas*, it becomes inclined to vice, ignorance,

attachment and impotence, and when overcome primarily by *rajas*, the opposite types of qualities. But both impel the consciousness of puruṣa outwards, drawing it to the external world, and thus saṁsāra, the cycle of birth and death. When all trace of *tamas* and *rajas* is removed, however, the citta mind attains the highest potential of its nature, which is *sattva*, illumination, peacefulness, discernment, etc.

When the citta mind attains the state of *sattva*, the distinction between the ultimate conscious principle, puruṣa, and even the purest and most subtle states of prakṛti, matter, becomes revealed. Buddhi is the aspect of the citta that produces such discrimination, when resting in its highest potential of *sattva* and not influenced by the debilitating presence of *rajas* and *tamas*. When freed from the obscuration of the other two *guṇas*, which divert consciousness away from its source and into the external world of objects and internal world of thought, the pure *sattva* nature of the citta directs consciousness inwards towards the inner self. It is like a mirror that, freed from the coverings of dirt, can now reflect things clearly, says Vijñānabhikṣu, and can ultimately reflect the puruṣa soul. The ensuing state of contemplation is known as saṁprajñāta samādhi, the highest level of discriminative thought for Vyāsa. In short, Yoga is about eliminating *rajas* and *tamas*, and allowing the *sattva* nature of the citta to manifest.

**T**HE COMMENTATOR HARIharānanda Āraṇya notes that the means to still the vṛttis, or fluctuations of the citta as prescribed by Patañjali, is meditation, which he defines as keeping the mind fixed on any particular object of choice without distraction.

<sup>10</sup>These cover such things as: prescribed duty and its mode of performance, worship, diet, charity, sacrifice, austerity, knowledge, activity, understanding, determination, attainment of happiness, and future birth.

By concentration and meditation, the distracting influences of rajas and tamas are suppressed, and the sattva aspect of the citta can manifest to its full potential. Since sattva is by nature discriminating, it recognizes the distinction between puruṣa and prakṛti, when not distracted by the other two guṇas. Since sattva is also by nature luminous and lucid, it is able to reflect puruṣa in an undistorted way, once the disruptive presences of rajas and tamas are stilled, and thus puruṣa becomes aware of the nature of its real self, just as a person can see his or her true face in the mirror once the dust has been removed. One of the goals of Yoga is for the citta to develop such discrimination, and to reflect the true image of puruṣa to itself.

Vyāsa points out, however, that the very faculty of discrimination – even its ability to distinguish between matter and spirit – is nonetheless a feature of sattva, and sattva itself is still an aspect of prakṛti. His point is that discrimination is not a function of puruṣa. Puruṣa, the pure and eternal power of consciousness, never changes; it does not transform when in contact with states of mind. Rather, consciousness passively reveals objects, whether in the form of gross external sense objects, or subtle internal thoughts, including the higher stage of discrimination, just as light passively reveals gross and subtle objects in a dark room and yet is not affected by them. Hariharānanda Āraṇya states that the consciousness of puruṣa, citi-śakti, is pure, infinite, immutable, detached and illuminating. Therefore, discrimination, even the ultimate

discrimination of the distinction between puruṣa and prakṛti, is not a function of puruṣa, but of buddhi, the discriminating function of citta and subtlest aspect of prakṛti, when its full sattvic potential is manifest. This discrimination of buddhi, albeit indispensable in the yogi's progress, still connects puruṣa to prakṛti in its finest aspect, and must be transcended for full liberation to manifest. There is thus a still higher goal in Yoga.

When the citta mind restrains even the ability to discriminate, and exists in an inactive state in which all thoughts remain only in potential but not active form, in other words, when all thoughts have been stilled, one has reached a state of mind where nothing is cognized (all cognition, after all, is connected to the world of prakṛti). One can then transcend discrimination and go beyond the reflection of puruṣa in the mirror of the sattvic buddhi, to realize its source, the actual puruṣa itself. This is the samādhi called asaṃprajñāta, the trance in which nothing can be discerned except the pure self. In this stage, the citta, which is ultimately an interface between the puruṣa and the external world, becomes redundant and can be discarded by the yogi.<sup>11</sup> This is the ultimate goal of Yoga and thus of human existence. This stage, however, states Hariharānanda Āraṇya, must be preceded by saṃprajñāta samādhi, meditation, that is, concentration on an object so that the vṛttis of thought mentioned in this verse are fully stilled. All this will be discussed in detail in the following verses.

The commentator Bhoja Rājā raises a possible objection to the existence of puruṣa, the soul, which is in all probability an implicit reference to the teachings of Buddhism (or, less likely, of the atheistic teacher Cārvāka).<sup>12</sup> If the soul, or pure consciousness, is separated from the objects of consciousness, then would it not cease to exist altogether, like fire ceases to exist when the wood upholding it is destroyed? In other words, if the vṛtti fluctuations of thought are eliminated, what would consciousness be conscious of? Buddhists hold that the human persona consists of five sheaths, skandhas, one of which is consciousness.<sup>13</sup> None of these skandhas are eternal. For Buddhists, when the objects of consciousness are removed, so is consciousness – there is thus no ultimate, eternal, removable entity such as a puruṣa, or soul that is separable from the objects of consciousness, as almost all Hindu thought holds. The hedonist Cārvāka also denied the existence of the soul, albeit on different grounds, and both he and Buddhist theologians used the analogy of the wood and fire to argue that consciousness is generated by an object; it is not an entity *sui generis* with an independent existence. This position thus explicitly rejects the central tenet of the Yoga school, which is predicated on the existence of an eternal immutable puruṣa that is separable from the objects of consciousness. To answer such objections to the premise of Yoga, says Bhoja Rājā, Patañjali offers the next verse in the text. ❖

To be continued.

<sup>11</sup>As will be discussed below, there is a difference of opinion as to whether full asaṃprajñāta samādhi can be experienced while alive, or whether it entails the complete abandonment of the physical and cognitive apparatus of the body and mind.

<sup>12</sup>Cārvāka held that consciousness is a by-product of the material elements of the body when these come together in a certain combination. He compared this to betel leaf, lime and nut, which although not originally red, all acquire a reddish tinge when chewed together, or to molasses, which although originally non-intoxicating, becomes an intoxicant when allowed to ferment.

<sup>13</sup>The five skandhas, sheaths or aggregates, also known as *khandha* in Pali, are: 1) the aggregate of matter – the sense organs and their objects; 2) the aggregate of sensations; 3) the aggregate of perceptions; 4) the aggregate of mental functions; and 5) the aggregate of consciousness. This latter has the other khandas as its basis; it cannot exist separately. So consciousness is named according to the condition through which it arises, e.g. sensual consciousness, visual consciousness, mental consciousness, etc. Since this khandha depends on the others, it is not considered separable or eternal for Buddhists, as it is for the followers of Yoga and almost all Hindu sects.

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# NĀMĀRŪPA

## MAHĀ ŚIVARĀTRI ISSUE

SPRING 2003

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