

NĀMARŪPA

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NĀMARŪPA seeks to present articles that shed light on the incredible array of DARŚANAS, YOGAS, and VIDYĀS that have evolved over thousands of years in India's creatively spiritual minds and hearts. The publishers have created this journal out of a love for the knowledge that it reflects, and desire that its content be presented clearly and inspirationally, but without any particular agenda or sectarian bias. The aim is to permit contributors to present offerings that accurately represent their own traditions, without endorsement or condemnation. Each traditional perspective on reality is like a different branch on a vast tree of knowledge, offering diverse fruits to the discerning reader.

Though NĀMARŪPA begins life as a tender sprout, it will, as it grows, offer shade, shelter and sustenance to its readers and contributors alike, it is hoped. Now, though, it needs nurturing with articles, images, ideas and contributions. We invite you to support us in any way that you can. www.namarupa.org

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*Temple tank, Kapaleśvar Temple, Mylapore, Chennai,
Tamil Nadu, South India. January 10, 2007.*

YOGA SŪTRA OF PATAÑJALI & ITS COMMENTARIES

Edwin Bryant's translation of Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras with commentaries contributes to the growing body of literature on classical yoga by providing insights from all traditional Sanskrit commentators on the text.

EDWIN BRYANT

वृत्तयः पञ्चतय्यः क्लिष्टाक्लिष्टाः।

1.5 *Vṛttayah pañcatayyāḥ klišṭāklišṭāḥ.*

Vṛttayah, the changing states of mind; *pañcatayyāḥ*, five-fold; *klišṭa*, detrimental, harmful, damaging, afflicted; *aklišṭāḥ*, nondetrimental, unafflicted.

There are five kinds of changing states of the mind, and they are either detrimental or nondetrimental [to the practice of yoga].

PATAÑJALI HAS GIVEN HIS DEFINITION OF *yoga* in I.2. As has been noted, the term *vṛtti* is used frequently throughout the *Yoga Sūtras* to essentially refer to any sensual impression, thought, idea, or mental cognition, activity, or state whatsoever. Since the mind is never static but always active and changing, *vṛttis* are constantly being produced, and thus constantly absorb the consciousness of *puruṣa* away from its own pure nature, directing it out into the realm of subtle or gross *prakṛti*. In I.2, Patañjali defined *yoga* as the complete cessation of all *vṛttis* whatsoever. Here Patañjali turns his attention to what these *vṛttis* that must be eliminated are. There are five categories of *vṛttis*, which will be discussed in the following verses, and Patañjali indicates that these can be either conducive (at least initially) to the ultimate goal of *yoga*, or detrimental.

Vyāsa states that the detrimental *vṛttis* are caused by the five *kleśas*, the impediments to the practice of *yoga* that will be discussed in II.3—the term

for detrimental here is *klišṭa*, which comes from the same verbal root as *kleśa* (*kliṣ*). These types of mental states are detrimental to the goals of *yoga* because they are the fertile soil from which the seeds of *karma* sprout. When under the influence of the detrimental *vṛttis*, the mind becomes attracted or repelled by sense objects drawing its attention. In its attempt to attain that which attracts it and avoid that which repels it, the mind provokes action, *karma*, which initiates a vicious cycle that will be discussed below.

Karma, from the root *kṛ*, to 'do' or 'make,' literally means 'work,' but inherent in the Indic concept of work, or any type of activity, is the notion that every action breeds a reaction. Thus *karma* refers not only to an initial act, whether benevolent or malicious, but also to the reaction it produces (pleasant or unpleasant in accordance with the original act), which ripens for the actor either in this life or a future one. (Hence, people are born into different socioeconomic situations, and pleasant or unpleasant things happen to them throughout life in accordance with their own previous actions.)

This cycle of action and reaction, or *samsāra*, is potentially eternal and unlimited since not only does any one single act breed a reaction, but the actor must then react to this reaction causing a re-reaction, which in turn fructifies and provokes re-reactions, and so on *ad infinitum*. Thus, since the vicious cycle of action and reaction for just one solitary momentary act is potentially unlimited, and since one has to act at

every moment of one's life (even blinking or breathing is an act), the storehouse of *karma* is literally unlimited. Since these reactions and re-reactions, etc., cannot possibly be fitted into one life, they spill over from one lifetime into the next. It is in an attempt to portray the sheer unlimited and eternal productive power of *karma* that Indic thinkers, both Hindu and Buddhist, use such metaphors as 'the ocean' of birth and death. Thus *karma*, which keeps consciousness bound to the external world and forgetful of its own nature, is generated by the detrimental *vṛttis*, and the *vṛttis*, in turn, are produced by the *kleśas*, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The nondetrimental mental *vṛttis*, on the other hand, are produced by the *sattvic* faculty of discrimination that seeks to control the influence of *rajas* and *tamas* and thereby the detrimental *vṛttis* that they produce. Vyāsa notes that this type of *vṛtti* is beneficial even if situated in a stream of detrimental *vṛttis*.¹ In other words, for the novice struggling to control his or her mind, even if the emergence of *sattva* occurs only periodically, it is always a beneficial occurrence, and it can be gradually increased and strengthened by a yogic lifestyle. The reverse also holds true, adds Vyāsa: detrimental *vṛttis* can also surface periodically in a predominantly *sattvic* *citta* (hence the *Gītā's* statement in II.60 that the senses can carry away the mind even of a man of discrimination).

Vācaspatimiśra mentions activities such as the practice of *yoga* and the cultivation of desirelessness born from

¹Edwin Bryant's treatment of Sūtras 1-4 can be found in Issues 1 and 2 of *Nāmārūpa* magazine.

¹Just as a *brāhmaṇa* living in the village of Śāla, which is full of *Kirāṭas*, says Vācaspatimiśra, does not become a *Kirāṭa*. *Kirāṭa* were a tribe living in the east of India.

the study of scripture as non-detrimental, that is, mental activities beneficial to the goal of yoga. These actions, like any actions, produce seeds of reactions, *saṁskāras* (discussed further below), but these seeds are sattvic and beneficial to the path of yoga and the ultimate goal of samādhi. In time, and with practice, these seeds accumulate such that they eventually transform the nature of the mind. The mind then becomes more and more sattvic, or illuminated and contemplative, such that the beneficial *vṛttis* eventually suppress any stirrings of rajas and tamas—the detrimental *vṛttis*—automatically, until the later remain only as inactive potencies. When the citta manifests its pure sattva potential, it becomes “like” the *ātman*, says Vyāsa. By this he intends that it no longer binds the puruṣa to prakṛti, the world of saṁsāra, but reflects puruṣa in an undistorted fashion, allowing it to contemplate its true nature as per the mirror analogy outlined in the previous commentary. Rāmānanda Sarasvati notes here that essentially, the citta mind is nothing but *saṁskāras*, mental imprints or impressions (not to be confused with saṁsāra, the cycle of birth and death). *Saṁskāras* are a very important feature of yoga psychology: every sensual experience or mental thought that has ever been experienced forms a *saṁskāra*, an imprint, in the citta mind. The mind is thus a storehouse of these recorded *saṁskāras*, deposited and accumulated in the citta over countless lifetimes. Vyāsa notes that there is thus a cycle of *vṛttis* and *saṁskāras*: *vṛttis*, that is sense experiences and thoughts, etc. (and their consequent actions) are recorded in the citta as *saṁskāras*, and these *saṁskāras* eventually activate consciously or subliminally producing further *vṛttis*. These *vṛttis* then provoke the action and reaction noted above, which in turn are recorded as *saṁskāras*, and the cycle continues.

Memories, in Hindu psychology, are considered to be vivid *saṁskāras* from this lifetime, which are retrievable, while the notion of the subconscious in Western psychology corresponds to other, less retrievable *saṁskāras*, perhaps from previous lives, which

remain latent as subliminal impressions. *Saṁskāras* also account for such things as personality traits, habits, compulsive and addictive behaviors, etc. For example, a particular type of experience, say smoking a cigarette, is imprinted in the citta as a *saṁskāra*, which then activates as a desirable memory or impulse provoking a repetition of this activity which is likewise recorded, and so on, until a cluster or grove of *saṁskāras* of an identical or similar sort is produced in the citta, gaining strength with each repetition. The stronger or more dominant such a cluster of *saṁskāras* becomes, the more it activates and imposes itself upon the consciousness of the individual, demanding indulgence and perpetuating a vicious cycle that can be very hard to break. The *kleśas*, *vṛttis*, *saṁskāras*, and karma are thus all interconnected links in the chain of saṁsāra.

Through the practice of yoga, the yogi attempts to supplant all the rajasic and tamasic *saṁskāras* with sattvic ones until these, too, are restricted in the higher states of trance. This is because while sattvic *saṁskāras*, the nondetrimental *vṛttis* mentioned by Patañjali in this verse, are conducive to liberation, they nonetheless are still *vṛttis* and thus an external distraction to the pure consciousness of the *ātman*. Of course, as Vijñānabhikṣu points out, all *vṛttis*, including sattvic ones, are ultimately detrimental from the absolute perspective of the puruṣa, as they bind consciousness to the world of matter. So the notions of detrimental and non-detrimental are from the perspective of saṁsāra; the detrimental (rajasic and tamasic) *vṛttis* cause pain, and the non-detrimental (sattvic) ones at least lead in the direction of liberation, even though they too must eventually be given up. The phenomenon of non-detrimental *vṛttis* eventually undertaking their own elimination will be discussed more fully later on, but Vijñānabhikṣu quotes the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* here to make the point: “Other things [i.e., the obstacles to yoga] must be eliminated by sattva, and sattva is eliminated by sattva” (XI.25.20).

प्रमाणविपर्ययविकल्पनिद्रास्मृतयः ।

1.6 *Pramāṇaviparyayavikalpanidrāsmṛtayah*.

Pramāṇa, epistemology, source of valid proof, right knowledge; *viparyaya*, error; *vikalpa*, imagination, fancy; *nidrā*, sleep; *smṛtayah*, memory.

The five changing states of the mind are right knowledge, error, imagination, sleep, and memory.

PATAÑJALI HERE BEGINS HIS DEFINITION of what these *vṛttis*, which bind the puruṣa to the world of saṁsāra, are. He lists five distinct types of *vṛttis*. What this means, then, is that, in essence, the human mind finds itself in one of these five states at any given moment. In other words, all possible mental states that can be experienced are categorized by the yoga tradition as manifestations of one of these five types of *vṛttis*. The commentators reserve their comments for the ensuing verses, which explain each of these items in turn.

प्रत्यक्षानुमानागमाः प्रमाणानि ।

1.7 *Pratyakṣānumānāgamāḥ pramāṇāni*.

Pratyakṣa, sense perception; *anumāna*, inference, logic; *āgamāḥ*, testimony, verbal communication; *pramāṇāni*.

Right knowledge consists of sense perception, logic, and verbal testimony.

THE FIRST OF THE FIVE *VṚTTIS* TO be discussed is *pramāṇa*, viz, epistemology, that is, what constitutes valid knowledge of an object. Philosophy and, of course, science—*sāṁkhya*, after all, sees itself as dealing with physical reality—have as their goals the attainment of knowledge about reality, so it is standard in Hindu philosophical discourse for thinkers to state what methods of attaining such knowledge of reality they accept as valid. The Yoga School accepts three sources of receiving knowledge as valid, as does the Sāṁkhya tradition (*Sāṁkhya Kārikā* IV; but other

² The extra *pramāṇas* posited by other schools are considered by the Yoga school to be variants of the *pramāṇas* mentioned here.

philosophical schools accept differing numbers from one to six²). The first method of attaining knowledge listed by Patañjali is sense perception: we can know something to be true or valid if we experience it through one or more of our senses—if we see it, smell it, touch it, hear it, or taste it. Śaṅkara notes that sense perception is placed first on the list of *pramāṇas* because the other *pramāṇas* are dependent on it, as will be seen below (indeed, some philosophical schools such as that stemming from the materialist Carvāka accept sense perception as the only *pramāṇa*, arguing that the other means of knowledge are derived from it).

Vyāsa explains sense perception as being the state or condition of the mind, *vṛtti*, which apprehends both the specific and generic nature of an external object through the channels of the five senses.³ The “generic” and “specific” nature of objects are categories especially associated with one of the other six schools of Hindu philosophy noted earlier, the Vaiśeṣika School, and are technical ways of attempting to analyze physical reality. The generic nature of a dog that one might happen to come upon, for example, is that it belongs to the canine species; the specific nature is that which demarcates it from other members of this generic category, that it is, say, a ginger Irish terrier (technically speaking, *viśeṣa* is what differentiates ultimate entities such as the smallest particles of matter from each other, but Vyāsa is using the term in a looser sense⁴). When one sees a particular dog, the mind typically apprehends both its generic and specific natures. This apprehension is accomplished by the senses encountering a sense object and relaying an impression of the object to the *citta* mind, which forms a *vṛtti*, or impression, of the object. The *puruṣa* soul then becomes conscious of this

mental impression, as if it were taking place within itself, indistinguishable from itself. In actual fact, the impression is imprinted on the *citta* mind.

Vācaspatimiśra raises a question here. If the impression is imprinted on the mind, which, according to the metaphysics of *yoga*, is a totally separate entity from the *puruṣa* soul, then how is it that the latter is aware of it? (Or, as he puts it, if an axe cuts a *khadira* tree, it is not a *plakṣa* tree that is thereby cut). In other words, if an impression is something that is made on the mind, then how does it end up being made on the *puruṣa*? Here again, Vācaspatimiśra introduces the analogy of the mirror. It is the mind and intelligence that take the form of the object as a result of sense perception, not the soul. According to the “reflection” model of awareness, consciousness is reflected in the intelligence due to proximity and then misidentifies itself with the reflection. This reflection, in turn, is altered according to the form assumed by the intelligence—just as a reflection appears dirty if the mirror is dirty. Thus, since the mind and intelligence have taken the form of the object in question, consciousness sees its own reflection as containing that form. This corresponds to the analogy of the moon appearing rippled when reflected in rippling water. According to the “non-reflection” model, awareness simply pervades the *citta* just as it pervades the body, misidentifying with the forms of *citta* in the same way it misidentifies with the form of the body. According to either understanding, it is this misidentification of the awareness of *puruṣa* with the forms of the intellect that is the essence of ignorance.

Moving on to the second *pramāṇa*, source of receiving valid knowledge, mentioned by Patañjali in this verse, Vyāsa defines logic (inference) as the assumption that an object of a

particular category shares the same qualities as other objects in the same category—qualities that are not shared by objects in different categories. He gives the example of the moon and stars, which belong to the category of moving objects because they are seen to move, but mountains belong to a category of immobile objects, because they have never been seen to move. Thus, if one sees an unfamiliar mountain or hill, one can infer that it will not move, because other known objects in this category, that is, all mountains and hills with which one is familiar, do not move.

The more classic example of inference among Hindu logicians is that fire can be inferred from the presence of smoke. Since wherever there is smoke, there is invariably fire causing it, the presence of fire can be inferred upon the perception of smoke even if the actual fire itself is not perceived. So one can say with assurance that there must be fire on a distant mountain, even if one cannot actually see the blaze itself, if one sees clouds of smoke billowing forth from it. It is in this regard that inference, *anumāna*, differs from the first source of knowledge, *pratyakṣa*, sense perception. *Pratyakṣa* requires that one actually see the fire. In *anumāna* the fire itself is not actually seen, its presence is inferred from something else that is perceived, viz, smoke.⁵ The principle here is that there must always be an absolute and invariable relationship (concomitant), between the thing inferred, viz, the fire, and the reason upon which the inference is made, viz, the presence of smoke—in other words, wherever there is or has ever been smoke, there must at all places and at all times always be or have been fire present as its cause with no exceptions. If these conditions are met, the inference is accepted as a valid source of knowledge (if exceptions to the rule can be found, i.e., instances

³ The five senses are hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch.

⁴ In Vaiśeṣika, all manifest reality can be broken down into seven basic categories, one of which is “substance.” There are nine different types of substances, the minutest particles of earth, water, fire, gas, and ether (matter, liquids, energy, gas, space), the mind, the soul, time, and space. The “specific” aspect of one of these substances (*viśeṣa*, from which the school gets its name) is that which distinguishes one substance from another, which keeps particles, for example, separate and individual such that one can differentiate between one molecule of earth and another, or between one soul and another.

⁵ Some schools of thought, however, hold that *anumāna* is not a separate source of knowledge because it is predicated on sense perception—the smoke is seen, even if the fire is not—and thus it is a variant of *pratyakṣa* rather than an independent source of knowledge.

of smoke that do not have fire as their cause, then the inference is invalid).

Finally, “verbal testimony,” the third source of valid knowledge accepted by Patañjali, is the relaying of accurate information through the medium of words by a “trustworthy” person who has perceived or inferred the existence of an object, to someone who has not. The words of such a reliable authority enter the ear and produce an image, *vṛtti*, in the mind of the hearer that corresponds to the object experienced by the trustworthy person. The person receiving the information in this manner has neither personally experienced nor inferred the existence of the object of knowledge, but valid knowledge of the object is nonetheless achieved, which distinguishes this source of knowledge from the two discussed previously. Vyāsa describes a “trustworthy” person as someone whose statements cannot be contradicted. Vijñānabhikṣu adds to this that a reliable or trustworthy person is one who is free from defects such as illusion, laziness, deceit, dullwittedness, and so forth.

The most important category of this source of valid knowledge in the form of verbal testimony is divine scripture. Since scriptures are uttered by trustworthy persons in the form of enlightened sages and divine beings, their status as trustworthy sources of knowledge are especially valuable. In order to elaborate on this, Vācaspatiśra raises the issue as to how sacred scriptures can be considered valid given that all accurate verbal knowledge must itself originally come either from perception or inference (hence other schools do not even consider them separate sources of knowledge, as mentioned above); but scriptures deal with certain subjects that no human being has either seen or inferred (such as the existence of heavenly realms, etc.).

⁶ It is for this reason that some schools also reject scripture as a valid source of knowledge. Along the same lines as indicated in the previous footnote, such schools hold that scripture, too, is simply an extension or subcategory of *pratyakṣa*, sense perception.

⁷ The focus of the *Mīmāṃsā*, however, was on the scriptures pertaining to ritual, the *Brāhmaṇa* texts, as opposed to the mystico-philosophical *Upaniṣad* texts, that were of interest to the *Vedānta*.

In response to this, he argues that the truths of scripture have been perceived by God, *Īśvara*; thus divine scripture, too, is based on perception.⁶ And God, quips Rāmānanda Sarasvatī, is surely a trustworthy person!

Different schools of thought prioritized different *pramāṇas*. As we have seen with Vijñānabhikṣu’s comments on the first verse and elsewhere in the text, the Yoga School prioritizes *pratyakṣa*, direct experience, as the highest *pramāṇa*. The Nyāya School prioritizes *anumāna*, dedicating itself for centuries to refining categories of logic, and the *Vedānta* School, *āgama* (*Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.3), dedicating itself to the interpretation and systematization of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Vedānta Sūtras* derived from them (the *Mīmāṃsā* School, too, prioritized *āgama*, and became especially associated with developing hermeneutics—the methods of scriptural interpretation⁷). While Patañjali accepts *āgama* as a valid source of knowledge, one can note that he does not quote or even imply a single verse

from scripture in his treatise (in contrast with the *Vedānta Sūtras*, which are almost entirely composed of references from the *Upaniṣads*). While he uses *anumāna* on occasion, such as in his arguments against certain Buddhist views (IV.14-24), clearly almost his entire thrust throughout the *Sūtras* is on *pratyakṣa* as the ultimate form of knowledge. *Anumāna* and *āgama* are forms of knowledge but mediate forms, the truths of which are indirect, where the yoga tradition bases its claims to authoritativeness on direct personal experience (I.49). ❖

