

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF YOGA PRACTICE - PART II

In Book I, Sutra II, Patanjali gives a concise definition of the meaning of yoga: *Yoga citta vritti-nirodha*. This translates: "Yoga is the cessation or inhibition (*nirodha*) of the fluctuations and variations (*vrittis*) of the mind (*citta*)." Consciousness, as we normally experience it, is colored or biased by these fluctuations called *vrittis*.

The first book of the Yoga Sutras is called the *Samadhi Pada*. Pada means chapter or section. The word samadhi is literally translated as *putting together*. In the eight limbs of Patanjali, the concept of samadhi is referred to as a fully integrated state of consciousness. It is often thought of as a profound state of absorption in which the vrittis or fluctuations of consciousness are completely pacified. The first six sutras from the Samadhi Pada are as follows:

Sutra 1: *Atha-yoganusasanam*

*Atha* = an auspicious beginning actualized at the present moment

*Yoga* = joining/union/integration

*Anusasanam* = exposition/elucidation

**Now auspiciously begins the exposition and elucidation of yoga.**

Sutra 2: *Yoga cittavrtti nirodha*

*Yoga* = joining/union/integration

*Citta* = consciousness of the mind comprised of:

a. *Manas*- the cognitive faculty of sensory input

b. *Buddhi* - intellect

c. *Ahamkara* - sense of self/ego

*Vritti* = modifications/fluctuations/versions

*Nirodha* = restraint/inhibition

**Yoga is the cession of the fluctuations of the mind.**

Sutra 3: *Tada drastuh svarupe avasthanam*

*Tada* = then/at this time

*Drastuh* = perceiver

*Svarupe* = in its essential and true form

*Avasthanam* = established or abiding

**Then the perceiver abides in his/her own true form.**



Sutra 4: *Vritti sarupyam itaratra*

*Vritti* = modifications/fluctuations/versions

*Sarupyam* = identification/conforming with

*Itaratra* = otherwise/at other times

**Otherwise the perceiver identifies with the fluctuations of the mind.**

Sutra 5: *Vrttayah pancatayyah klista- aklista*

*Vrttayah* = modifications/fluctuations/versions

*Pancatayyah* = five faceted

*Klista* = afflicted or troubled

*Aklista* = not afflicted or free of trouble

**There are five fluctuations of consciousness. They can be perceived as disturbing or not disturbing.**

Sutra 6: *Pramana viparyaya vikalpa nidra smrtihayah*

*Pramana* = valid, accurate perception

*Viparyaya* = inaccurate perception

*Vikalpa* = fancy/imagination

*Nidra* = sleep

*Smrtihayah* = memory

**They are valid perception, inaccurate perception, imagination, sleep and memory.**

### **The Five Vrittis**

The five vrittis or fluctuations of consciousness are accurate perception, inaccurate perception, imagination, sleep and memory. Our perception of our world is the result of how we assimilate sensory information and assemble that information within our consciousness. Our interpretation becomes our view of the world, our personal, individual creation, or as we said last month, a little reality. Because the mind is constantly shifting between them, each of the vrittis can be thought of as a phase of this subjective creation process.

### **Accurate Perception** (Pramana)

All four of the other vrittis are used in the process of creating pramana. As pramana relates to accurate perception, it implies that the information acquired from our senses has been assembled by our consciousness as accurately as possible at a particular point in time.



The most interesting thing about pramana is that it is considered a vritti or fluctuation of consciousness at all. It implies that what we commonly think of as valid knowledge or reality, even accurately perceived, is only one possible description of the temporal realm. So it can be honestly said that different people will have different, yet equally accurate and valid views of the world. Thus, within the confines of this changing universe we inhabit, it could be said that each of these views is accurate and permits each of us to function harmoniously within the world. So to experience pramana, we need to be as free as possible from perceptual bias. The first four limbs are tools which help us to accomplish this.

Pramana can be a problem if we lose sight of the fact that regardless of the accuracy of our particular point of view, it remains only *our* description or experience of the world and not necessarily that of someone else. Therefore the more expansive our horizon of awareness becomes, the greater will be our ability to embrace and respect the experience and perspectives of others.

Perception is a subjective, dynamic and ever-changing experience. Because our perception of life is ever-changing, the elements that produce pramana are also in flux. What we perceive to be pramana can become any of the other vrittis, such as memory or imagination, at different points in time. We must continually refine and restructure our view of the world to sustain valid perception.

### **Inaccurate Perception** (Viparyaya)

Viparyaya implies that we have accurately acquired information but assembled it in an inaccurate manner. We could say that the cognitive faculties (*manas*) are functioning, but our (*buddhi*) or discriminative intellect is distorting the experience. This is typically caused by our samskaras: the momentum behind the mental and emotional patterns of our consciousness. The momentum of these samskaras inhibits our ability to accurately perceive things as they exist in the present. In other words, the momentum of these patterns affects how accurately we can assemble the information we receive from the world. The force of these samskaras within us is sometimes referred to as *karma*.

Viparyaya can be seen as a necessary phase that we go through on our way to pramana, like a sorting out process in which we are organizing information. Viparyaya becomes a problem only when we mistake the inaccurate or incomplete knowledge for an accurate conclusion. Both viparyaya and pramana are dynamic processes. As we



seek to understand the dynamics of life, we are always fluctuating back and forth between pramana and viparyaya, tempering one against the other, as well as all the other vrittis.

### **Imagination** (Vikalpa)

Vikalpa is a state or fluctuation that occurs when the mind creates an image of the world that is not based on currently or externally accurate information. This can be an extremely beneficial thing because we can use this vritti to form ideas and create things within our minds that may never have existed in this world before. In our virtual world we can evaluate the merits of our creation using the vritti of pramana and then, tempered by the observance of yama and niyama, we can decide if these creations can or should be made manifest.

Vikalpa can be a problem if we are not aware that we are in the state of vikalpa and think that our imaginary creation is pramana. This may be considered a very neurotic or even psychotic state.

### **Sleep** (Nidra)

Sleep is a state of consciousness where our awareness is no longer focused on the external, temporal world. Unfortunately for most people, it is also a state within which there is very little self-awareness. Sleep is often divided into two primary categories: dreaming and dreamless sleep. How much of our sleep is spent in one or the other is to a great degree analogous with the qualities of our waking mind. The greater our self-awareness is in our waking state, the more aware or lucid we are likely to be in the dream state, although this can be modified by many factors.

In sleep we no longer have external sensory input to provide the stimulation for our thoughts so the subconscious mind communicates to the conscious mind through symbolic images called dreams. Dreams can almost be thought of as a combination of memory (smrtih) and imagination (vikalpa). In other words, we have memories of life events and utilize our imagination to create the images perceived in dreams.

Awareness within the dreamless state is no more common for most people than the ability to stop (nirodha) the internal dialogue of our waking consciousness. Many people are unaware that they can even be conscious without a perpetual stream of thoughts flowing through their mind while they are awake. But try to imagine what the perceptual framework of a child is like before it has language, and how relatively unobstructed that perception must be. As the mind becomes more disciplined, we can effectively control where, when and how we utilize thoughts; we can determine when it is best to think in words or when direct intuitive perception is the better choice.

As we develop greater self-awareness and mental discipline in our waking state, we can transfer it to the dream state. In so doing, dreaming can become both volitional and insightful.

### **Memory** (Smrtih)

Memory is the mental revisiting of stored experiences created in any of the other vrittis. The quality of smrtih itself can be seen as possessing attributes from any of the other vrittis. For example, in the same way we can have accurate or inaccurate perception in the present, we can have accurate and inaccurate memories. Or in the same way that we can remember things that had physical manifestation, we can just as easily recall things we imagined or dreamed. Accurate memory is when we can recall not only the memories themselves but also the vritti in which they were created. This is crucial because inaccurate memory can be devastating and destructive.

The longer a memory exists in the mind without being reinforced by associative external forces, the greater the likelihood that it will be modified by other internal states or vrittis. This is one of the reasons why we are motivated to record our history, talk with one another, and save memorabilia. As we externalize memory through speech and symbol, we have a better chance of keeping the memory accurate. However, due to the effect of the other vrittis which are constantly fluxing through our awareness, there is no guarantee that our memories will remain accurate.

By increasing our awareness of the vrittis and how they are affecting our consciousness, we can gain a better understanding of how our awareness creates our world. We can also gain the ability to use our minds rather than having our minds use us. The watchword in yoga is *Aham Brahmasmi*, "I am the creative principle." This means we acknowledge that we are the creators of our life. If we believe that someone or something else is responsible for the status of our life, then we are enslaved to that person,



image or projection. By accepting that we create and sustain the circumstances of our life and that only we can dissolve or change them, we come to understand that if we are not content (santosha) with our creation, we can create something more satisfying. This is not to say that people and events in the world will not affect us, because they will. But how we respond to Life, our attitude and interpretation, is within our control. Accepting responsibility for creating our experience of life is the first step towards freedom.

