

the *tanmātras* are still very *sāttvic* in nature. These, in turn, sequentially produce the five *mahābhūtas*, or gross elements—ether, air, fire, water, and earth—the world of form, the actual physical, tangible stuff of the universe. This evolutionary sequence must be kept in mind in order to understand the metaphysics behind a number of *sūtras* in the *Yoga Sūtras*, particularly those that deal with the mystic powers.

The Sāṅkhya system is classified in Indian thought as *satkārya*, namely, that the effects of the world are present in their cause. This is one of the important points to keep in mind: Gross matter is actually an evolute or derivative of something subtler, the subtle elements, and these of something subtler still, the ego, which is an evolute of *buddhi*, intelligence. This means *buddhi* underpins all reality, even as *buddhi* itself is a manifestation of *prakṛti* and the *guṇas*, or, put differently, any expression of reality, subjective or objective, is nothing other than a manifestation of the *guṇas*. These evolutes are all called *tattvas*, thatnesses; they are the real constituents of “that” world out there perceived by the self.

The Goals of Yoga

According to Patañjali’s definition in the very first *sūtra*, *yoga* is the cessation (*nirodha*) of the activities or permutations (*vyrttis*) of the *citta*. The *vyrttis* refer to any sequence of thought, ideas, mental imaging, or cognitive act performed by the mind, intellect, or ego as defined above—in short, any state of mind whatsoever. It cannot be overstressed that the mind is merely a physical substance that selects, organizes, analyzes, and molds itself into the physical forms of the sense data presented to it; in and of itself it is not aware of them. Sense impressions or thoughts are imprints in that mental substance, just as a clay pot is a product made from the substance clay, or waves are permutations of the sea. The essential point for understanding *yoga* is that all forms or activities of the mind are products of *prakṛti*, matter, and completely distinct from the soul or true self, *puruṣa*, pure awareness or consciousness.

The *citta* can profitably be compared to the software, and the body to the hardware. Neither is conscious; they are rather forms of gross matter, even as the former can do very intelligent activities. Both soft-

ware and hardware are useless without the presence of a conscious observer. Only *puruṣa* is truly alive, that is, aware or conscious. When uncoupled from the mind, the soul, *puruṣa*, in its pure state, that is, in its own constitutional, autonomous condition—untainted by being misidentified with the physical coverings of the body and mind—is free of content and changeless; it does not constantly ramble and flit from one thing to another the way the mind does. To realize pure awareness as an entity distinct and autonomous from the mind (and, of course, body), thought must be stilled and consciousness extracted from its embroilment with the mind and its incessant thinking nature. Only then can the soul be realized as an entity completely distinct from the mind (a distinction such clichés as “self-realization” attempt to express), and the process to achieve this realization is *yoga*.

In conventional existence, *puruṣa*'s awareness of objects is mediated by means of *buddhi*, the intellect. As the discriminatory aspect of the mind, the intelligence is the first interface between the soul and the external world. More specifically, the soul becomes aware of the outside world when images of sense objects are channeled through the senses, sorted by the *manas*, the thinking and organizing aspect of *citta*, and presented to the intellect. Although inanimate, the intellect, in addition to its functions of discrimination noted earlier, molds itself into the form and shape of these objects of experience, thoughts, and ideas, and, due to the reflection of the consciousness of *puruṣa*, appears animated. Since the soul is adjacent to²³ the intellect (and the *citta* in general), the intellect is the immediate covering of *puruṣa*; hence it is through the intellect that *puruṣa* becomes aware of these forms and therefore of the objects of the world. The pure consciousness of the soul pervades the *citta*, animating it, just as a torch, although distinct in its own right, pervades an inanimate object with light and makes it appear luminous.

Pervaded by this consciousness, the *citta* mind appears as if it itself were conscious, as metal placed into intense fire becomes molten and appears as if fire. But the mind animated by consciousness is in reality unconscious—just as an object appears illuminated in its own right but is in actuality dependent on an outside light source for its illumination and visibility. Most important, the soul, the pure and eternal power of consciousness, never changes; as a spectator or witness, it

does not itself transform when in contact with the ever-changing states of mind. It simply becomes aware of them. Just as light passively reveals gross and subtle objects in a dark room and yet is not itself affected or changed by them, consciousness passively reveals objects, whether in the form of gross external physical objects or subtle internal thoughts, *vṛttis*, including the higher stage of discrimination, but is not itself actually affected or touched by them. But the awareness of the pure soul does permeate or shine on the *citta*, like a projector light permeating inanimate pictorial forms of a movie reel, thereby animating these pictures as if they had a life of their own. In so doing the animated mind misidentifies consciousness with itself, equating consciousness with the churnings of thought, *vṛttis*, as if consciousness were inherent within itself rather than the effulgence of an entity outside and separate from itself. This misidentification is ignorance, *avidyā*, and the cause of bondage in *samsāra*. It is the mysterious glue that binds the self to the world of matter in all Indic soteriological traditions. (Ignorance is mysterious, since the question of how it comes to arise in the first place is bypassed by all Indic metaphysicians by stating that it is beginningless.²⁴)

According to some commentators, such as Vijñānabhikṣu, the intellect functions like a mirror. Just as light bounces off an illuminated reflective object back to its source, the consciousness of the soul bounces off this animated intellect that presents a reflection to the soul (Vijñānabhikṣu's double-reflection theory is sometimes referred to in this commentary, being in my view more cogent than Vācaspati Miśra's single-reflection theory²⁵). Because *sattva* is predominant in the intellect, it is able to reflect pure consciousness back to itself. Just as we become conscious of our appearance in a mirror due to its reflectivity, the soul becomes conscious of its reflection in the animated intellect. But since the intellect is constantly being molded into the images presented to it by the mind and senses, this reflection presented back to the *puruṣa* soul is distorted or transformed by changing forms, *vṛttis*, just as our reflection in a mirror is distorted if the mirror is warped. The soul, that is, the actual source of consciousness, is mistaken to be this distorted reflection by the mind, which considers awareness to be inherent within itself rather than a feature of the *puruṣa*, an entity completely outside of and separate from itself. The soul

is thus identified with the world of change through these changing states of mind, the *vṛttis*, just as we may look at our reflection in a dirty mirror and mistakenly think that it is we who are dirty.

Whether the *vṛttis* of the *citta* are reflected back to the *puruṣa* soul, or whether consciousness simply becomes aware of them by proximity and pervasion, the soul nonetheless is identified with the experiences of the body and mind—birth, death, disease, old age, happiness, distress, peacefulness, anxiety, etc., even though these are merely transformations occurring in the inanimate and external body and mind, and therefore unconnected with the *puruṣa*. They are nothing other than the permutations of gross and subtle matter external to the soul that are pervaded by the soul's awareness. But awareness is misidentified with these permutations, as a result of which the self (that is, the mind animated by consciousness) considers itself to be subject to birth and death, happiness and distress, etc., and it is this misidentification, or ignorance, that is the root of bondage to the world. *Yoga* involves preventing the mind from being molded into these permutations, the *vṛttis*, the impressions and thoughts of the objects of the world, such that *puruṣa* can regain its autonomous nature.

To accomplish this, one of the goals of *Yoga* meditation, as discussed repeatedly by our commentators, is to maximize the proportion of the *guṇa* of *sattva* in the mind and correspondingly decrease that of *rajas* and *tamas*. When all trace of *tamas* and *rajas* is stilled, the mind attains the highest potential of its *prākṛtic* nature—illumination, peacefulness, discernment, etc., all qualities inherent in *sattva*. When the *citta* mind has cultivated a state of almost pure *sattva*,²⁶ the discriminative aspect of *buddhi*, intelligence, can reveal the distinction between the ultimate conscious principle, the *puruṣa* soul, and even the purest and most subtle (but nonetheless unconscious) states of *prakṛti*. When manifesting its highest potential of *sattva* and suppressing its inherent potential of *rajas* and *tamas*, which divert consciousness from its source, *puruṣa*, and into the external world of objects and internal world of thought, the pure *sattva* nature of the mind can recognize the distinction between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and redirect consciousness back inward toward this inner self (one of the ultimate goals of *yoga*), just as a dusty mirror can reflect things clearly when cleaned. In short, *yoga* can also be viewed as the process of stilling the

potential of *rajas* and *tamas*, and allowing the maximum potential *sattva* nature of the mind to manifest, and the commentators often promote it this way.

The means prescribed by Patañjali to still the *vṛtti* states of mind or fluctuations of thought is meditation, defined as keeping the mind fixed on any particular object of choice without distraction. God, *Īśvara*, comes highly recommended in this regard; *Yoga* is clearly, but nondogmatically, a theistic system. By concentration and meditation (or by the power of God's grace), the distracting influences of *rajas* and *tamas* can be curtailed, and the *sattva* constitution of the mind can exhibit its full potential.

Through grace or the sheer power of concentration, the mind can attain an inactive state where all thoughts remain only in potential but not active form. In other words, through meditation one can cultivate an inactive state of mind where one is not cognizant of anything. This does not mean to say that consciousness becomes extinguished, Patañjali hastens to inform us (as does the entire Upaniṣadic/Vedāntic tradition); consciousness is eternal and absolute. Therefore, once there are no more thoughts or objects on its horizons or sphere of awareness, consciousness has no alternative but to become conscious of itself. In other words, consciousness can either be object-aware or subject-aware (loosely speaking).²⁷ The point is that it has no option in terms of being aware on some level, since awareness is eternal and inextinguishable. By stilling all thought, meditation removes all objects of awareness. Awareness can therefore now be aware only of itself. It can now bypass or transcend all objects of thought, disassociate from even the pure *sāttvic citta*, and become aware of its own source, the actual soul itself, *puruṣa*. This is self-realization (to use a neo-Vedāntic term), the ultimate state of awareness, the state of consciousness in which nothing can be discerned except the pure self, *asamprajñāta-samādhi*. This is the final goal of *yoga* and thus of human existence.

The Eight Limbs of Yoga

Asamprajñāta-samādhi is the highest stage of the eighth and final limb of *yoga* presented by Patañjali to attain this lofty goal. These eight limbs are *yama*, abstentions, moral restraints; *niyama*, ethical obser-