

Raja Yoga Email Classes

For: SRV disciples, devotees, and students of Yoga
Originally offered by Babaji Bob Kindler and the SRV Associations
through the mediums of email and “snail mail.”

Invocation:

*yogena chittasya padena vaccham
malam sharirasya cha vaidyakena
yo'pakarot tam pravaram muninam
patanjalin pranjalir anato'smi*

“He who removed the impurities of mind (by teaching Yoga), of speech (by exposition of grammar), and of body (by composing works on the science of medicine), unto that great sage of sages, Patanjali, we bow down with reverent salutations.”

Lesson One, 5/28/05

Elucidation on Chapter 1 of Raja Yoga,
“Introduction”

To begin our study of the Raja Yoga system of Patanjali, also called “Patanjala” and “Ashtanga Yoga,” all participants have been asked to read both the Preface and the Introduction of Swami Vivekananda’s book entitled Raja Yoga, which is the primary text we will be utilizing for this study. In addition, I have suggested out front that we begin this auspicious study by asking for questions that might spring from your reading of these two preliminary bodies of text, so that my own introduction which accompanies our first installment will be geared toward what the students are pondering at the outset of this noble undertaking. Therefore, below please take the first installment of this email class wherein are placed and arranged a number of questions and answers that have arrived in advance, from all of you, all interspersed with teachings drawn from Yoga system commentators and attended with my comments and insights as well.

In my treatment of this study I will be drawing mainly from the great Vedavyasa and his commentary on the Yoga Sutras, which is probably the most authoritative. As a result, what you will be imbibing overall is the Father of Yoga’s authentic sutras, brought into clearer light by the Father of Vedanta, placed in lucid and contemporary terms by the incomparable Swami Vivekananda, and rendered as a cogent system for contemplation and daily practice in current times by myself. For we must remember that Swamiji (an affectionate and respectful appellation used for Vivekananda from here on out) cautioned early on in Raja Yoga that this system should not be attempted without the presence and guidance of a teacher, a guru, or preceptor. That is why when many of you have asked me in the past which of Swamiji’s four books on the Four Yogas one should read, I have steered you all in most cases towards Bhakti and Karma Yoga first, then later to the Jnana Yoga. When these have been completed, and you have finally come to ask if you should read the Raja Yoga, I have usually responded that it needs to be studied with a teacher. A cursory read is, of course, helpful, but in my experience I have found that even here a teacher should be consulted early on during the initial process, so that misconceptions and false assumptions do not creep into the mind.

Basics of Raja Yoga in Brief

Before taking up any questions or considering the actual sutras, we can benefit immensely by grounding ourselves in both the history and the terminology of Yoga. Historically speaking, Patanjali lived long after Lord Kapila, who was the founder of the Sankhya system of philosophy — one of the very earliest we have on human record. As I have taught many of you already in the early years of SRV Associations, the Sankhya system with its delineation of the Twenty-four Cosmic principles, its Eight Great Accomplishments, its Nine Complacencies, its

Five Cosmic Bondages, and other salient teachings (see your early notes on Tattva Samasa Sutras), burst upon the scene early on in the ancient history of India, influencing both Yoga and Vedanta profoundly. The ingenious way that Lord Kapila went about gathering and propounding his teachings after he had gained illumination of mind has ever since influenced other great spiritual luminaries in formulating their own systems, systems such as Buddhism and the various Tantric schools of thought and practice. It is wise, therefore, to have a working knowledge of Sankhya Philosophy, something that we cannot easily take recourse to in this class, but something you can pursue on your own if you are an avid seeker of Truth and realization. To help, however, I will be including certain teachings of Lord Kapila in this series of classes on Raja Yoga so that you will get some foundation in it, especially where it pertains to the fuller comprehension of certain of the Yoga Sutras.

So, after the Sankhya system came Yoga. To be a “Yogi,” (on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, Sri Krishna told Arjuna, “Therefore, be thou a Yogi, Arjuna.”) one must strive to develop supersensuous powers that help one transcend both mundane conceptualization and conventional wisdom. These, practiced sedulously and with proper guidance, will lead one to the experience of higher Truth. To develop these powers one must practice certain disciplines set forth by the philosophy. Relatedly, I trust that all of you, short of just reading these teaching installments sent to you either via email or “snail-mail,” will engage in practicing the yogic disciplines and writing in to the class with certain of the results that you may experience. And here I must reassert that practicing yoga does not always bring forth only “good” experiences, but also “bad” ones, and that the bad ones are as important to bring up and look at as their opposites. As Sri Krishna and other luminaries of the Vedic pathways to Truth never tire of informing us, to remain steady and unaffected in the midst of good and bad, praise and blame, honor and dishonor, pleasure and pain, etc., is critical to the attainment of the unique fruits of spirituality.

Yoga differs from Sankhya in its outright acceptance of God. In the Sankhyic period, the emphasis fell more upon the effort to show the difference between the soul and nature, between the sentient and insentient — Purusha and Prakriti. Thus, there was less said about the nature of Reality and more inferred as to the nature of nonreality. In Yoga, later, this emphasis shifted somewhat and settled more upon the combination of self-effort married to reliance on God. Of course, this God was seen as being imbued with form. Both God with form, and all manner of reliance got transcended when Formless Reality was attained in the highest Samadhi (the Eighth Limb of Yoga). So, the Sanskrit word, “Ishvara,” takes on new meaning under the auspice of Patanjali’s Yoga. He declares that worship of God and meditation upon God are two of the main means of attaining Ultimate Knowledge. The need to believe in God in order to begin the practice Yoga he does not enjoin, however, for Truth, he avers, will make Itself known over time in spite of belief or disbelief. Nevertheless, the path to God is made more manageable through methods such as devotion and meditation, and since the spiritual path is generally known as “the razor’s-edged path,” such advice should be considered seriously.

Lord Patanjali states, then, that Ishvara, God with form, is “A special kind of being distinct from man, in-so-much as He is not subject to ignorance and the products of ignorance.” As well, according to the Yoga system, Ishvara is not the “Creator” of the universe, and this falls in line with my own emphasis in SRV classes over the past 14 years wherein I have striven to tell and convince the people of the West and of modern times, in the fashion of Lord Vasishtha, that what both Western Science and Theology call “creation” is really a projection of vibratory waves, (what Patanjali terms “vrittis” in the chitta/mind-stuff), and that this projection is the gross or apparent effect of a more subtle cause called “Cosmic Mind.” God, the Reality beyond mind, stands back as the uninvolved Witness of all this march of vibratory phenomena conjured up by the mind in Maya. Swamiji mentions this illusory march right away in the early pages of Raja Yoga, and in his various discourses often refers to it as belonging to the realm of cause and effect, of name and form, and thus being ultimately unreal.

So how does Ishvara/Ishvari fit into this scheme, since He/She is vested with name and form like all other beings? Patanjali states: “He was the teacher of even the earliest teachers,

since He is not limited by time." This reveals so many things, the chief among them being that as long as we inhabit bodies and minds in maya, we can and should take recourse to Ishvara — at least or until the state of nonduality dawns upon the more purified mind. Ishvara knows the "history" of the entire projection called heavens, earths, and hells, and knows it to BE a projection. Others are still busy taking this mental machination to be the reality, thereby projecting a false sense of actuality over it — a projection on top of another projection!

Everything in the realm of name and form falls under the mantle of maya. Though sobering at first, this penultimate realization, superior to everything else short of Atmajnana and Atmabrahma, confers some truly great insights. Some of these are called darshanas — cogent ways of seeing through the mind's convincing conjurings in maya. They spring from the spiritually-awakened mind to purify the benighted mind which has become distorted and unclear about its own powers. Great souls like Patanjali, then, ironically enough, have used this projecting power of the mind to formulate systems designed to break it down, to reveal how to withdraw what has been falsely, mistakenly, or uncontrollably projected; to dissolve and move aside or away what has apparently been made solid and sedentary; to dissemble every semblance of false superimposition that the mind conjures up. The end result of this effort is what we have come to think of in this day and age as "Enlightenment." Many people want and cherish It; few do what it takes to go after It and secure It. Called by various names such as Moksha, Mukti, Nirvana, Samadhi, Illumination, Self-Realization, etc., Patanjali calls it "Kaivalya." More on that after the preliminaries have been heard, studied, practiced, and implemented....

(Later in this Lesson....) The revealed scriptures all cite the superiority of the Jnana Yoga/Mano Yoga/Buddhi Yoga strain of paths for the sincere seeker. Sidetracks are not encouraged along the precipitous mountain slope of ascending Self-realization. Too many have fallen, some never to get up to try again. If the mind did indeed "create" everything, then it is also responsible for all that impedes and deters — the root ignorance that obscures our true nature, Atman. Purifying it will then be the ultimate solution, and the wise ones see this clearly and waste no time in actuating this process.

As a matter of course, let's look very briefly at the fourfold mind, the Antahkarana, the inner (antar) cause (karana), which Patanjali first presents as a threefold mind — Manas (dual mind), Buddhi (intellect), and Ahamkara (ego/sense of individuality):

Manas is defined as dual mind, for its function is to look out, notice, and behold all manner of diversity. It receives its impressions by gathering them from the senses and their limited perceptions, and is therefore bound to the senses and what they dictate. Left to its own devices, i.e., allowed to wander, it quickly loses itself among the sense-objects and forms a habit of brooding on them, even obsessing with them, experiencing pleasure when they are present and enjoyed, pain when they are absent and missed, and boredom when they are present but not able to be enjoyed. In varying degrees of manifestation, our commentator, Vedavyasa, assigns three states to the unawakened mind: a scattered mind (kshipta), a dull mind (mudha), and a restless mind (vikshipta), somewhat correlated and definitely associated with the gunas of tamas, rajas, and sattva in Vedanta. Controlled mind (ekagra) and "no mind" (niruddha) occupy superior positions. Thus, the very same mind can be controlled or left uncontrolled, leading to entirely differing states and qualities of existence. And therefore we have the Father of Yoga's most oft-repeated statement, wherein he declares that "Yoga is possible only through the control of the thought-waves of the mind." (sutra I: 2)

The mind reflects consciousness and so appears to be conscious, but Yoga philosophy declares that it is not. It only borrows intelligence from the Source — Atman. Since knowledge is a vritti — a wave in the mind — all knowledge is objective. The mind is not the seer, then, but is only an instrument of knowledge. The real seer remains subtle and behind the scenes. As an instrument, however, and if it be awakened and refined, mind becomes aware of the vast and limitless expanse of knowledge that lies within it as potential. For Patanjali confirms that all knowledge lies within us. The awakened mind can then utilize this treasure of knowledge in beneficial ways, pouring it into life and making it available for all. It is therefore that Sri

Krishna, early on in the 14th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, states: “Idam jnana upashritya — Take refuge in knowledge,” calling it also the “greatest of all purifiers” that leads the aspirant to perfection, “Jnanayoga samsiddhah,” (chapter 4).

Another aspect of the threefold mind, the buddhi (intellect) seems to be the source of all as well. But Patanjali, along with other founders of revered Indian darshanas, claim it to be only a mechanism. Again, when it is honed and refined, it not only helps destroy root-ignorance (mula-avidya), but also forms itself into a clear reflector that receives and transfers the vision of the Atman to the sincere seeker. Left unrefined, however, it is impeded with the assumptions of agency and ownership of all that enters into it, or at best only receives and systematically classifies knowledge for study and activity. Therefore, Vedanta likens it to a moon that “shines by borrowed light,” bereft of any inherent self-effulgence of its own,

The third aspect of antakarana, the individual ego mechanism, called ahamkara, is the ultimate pretender, for it claims knowledge as its own and utilizes it for various selfishly-oriented, self-motivated purposes. Left unripened by the lack of both self-surrender and the failure to worship Ishvara, the ego mechanism causes all manner of mischief and resultant suffering. When ripened by devotion to God, however, it swiftly expands in transparent fashion to embrace the Cosmic Personality, leading to immersion in the Formless Reality. For, at the root of the ego-sense is Purusha’s (the sentient Soul) momentary identification and dalliance with nature, the five senses, and the five elements. Ahamkara therefore lives and dies over and over again, waxing in the light of success leading to pleasure, and waning in the darkness of failure leading to pain. Its happiness is thereby stunted, interrupted, and short-lived, demonstrating the sobering truism that lasting happiness in the world based upon individual existence is both continually vexing and downright impossible.

Thought-waves (vrittis) are constantly rising and being modified in the mind/intellect/ego (manas/buddhi/chitta) mechanism. The soul, Purusha, remains outside of all this vibratory fluctuation, but only if it knows itself to be the All-sentient Principle. Taking refuge in the soul, in Atman, beings gain peace of mind leading to eternal Bliss, which has no opposite like its counterpart, happiness, and thereby remains constant— like any true Source.

This brief exposition on the threefold mind should act as a preliminary schooling into what Yoga, Sankhya, and Vedanta view as mind in general. Mind is not such a simple mechanism as we have been led to believe in our own brief and as yet incomplete intellectual upbringing in the West, but is intricately complex and invested with immense power — power that projects and withdraws the universe and all subtle worlds in space and time; power that can move in either direction, for construction or deconstruction.

Additionally, what we conventionally and sentimentally call “heart” is nothing other than mind, for those things we call feelings, emotions, sentiments, etc., and the host of problems, traumas, and “heartbreaks” that accompany them, really register and take root in the mind. We “feel” them in the center of our being, in our heart, but that is because it is the center of our being. The heart, in Vedanta, is Atman, the indivisible Soul. It is not the anatomical organ lying there in the rib-cage. That mass of emotions and feelings is actually in the mind, where complex knots form persistent subtle impressions (samskaras) which drag one in and out of manifested existence. Heart, not an organ used for the pumping of blood to the body, is the Atman, our center, our Soul. To know this is to know that all problems get worked out in the consciousness of the mind, whereas all refuge is gained in the Heart. The Heart, Atman, is ever-free of problems, so is to be sought; the mind is to be purified. The “pure of heart” of which Jesus spoke, and the “pure mind” cited by both Lord Buddha and Sri Ramakrishna, are thus one and the same.... (*continues*)