

atha yogānuśāsanam

Now the study of yoga begins

Some Notes on Yoga Sutras, Chapter 4

Introduction

In August 2000 I joined about 30 other people at a Viniyoga Open Retreat in Gloucestershire, led by Paul Harvey. The one-week retreat was, as always, a well-balanced blend of asana, pranayama, meditation and textual study. Paul is an excellent teacher; he has a profound knowledge of yoga philosophy, but makes it all easy to understand. The text we studied was Chapter 4 of the Yoga Sutras, not one that is usually given much attention. I had tried to read it before, without much success, but I now find that its meaning has become clearer. The following notes are based on Paul's teaching during the retreat, and any errors and obscurities are mine. You will probably find the notes easier to follow if you have a copy of Patanjali to refer to as you read.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER 4

1. *nimitta* = cause for change (1-3). Everything is there in the intelligence. You just have to find the intelligence to find the intelligence. So verses 1-3 talk about the tools, materials and intelligence.
2. *asmita* (4-7). Verses 4-7 talk about the quality and importance of the link with *nimitta*. The link is through ego (*asmita*) and the openness of the link determines its quality. The ego is the channel of communication. But when the ego gets in the way, the communication is impaired.
3. *vasana* = smells/seeds (8-11). These verses develop another theme - the influence of the past. Our past gets in the way. Sometimes our past is not relevant. The *vasana* will roll round again and again.
4. *guna* = qualities (12-14). The *guna* change all the time, and trigger *vasana*.
5. *uparaga* = attractiveness, interest (15-17). Our perception varies according to our interest in a given object. Our mood can change: it depends on what glitters for us.
6. *purusha* = the Self (18-22). The source of perception is something deeper: something variously known as *purusha*/ *drstr*/ *atma*/ *cit*.
7. *visheshā darshana* (23-29). A special quality of seeing arises in someone who has practised yoga for some time. The past no longer influences us as it has normally done. When you are in such a state, then *dharma megha samadhi* = contemplation-cloud-harmony.
8. *nivritti* = stopping (30-33). Then the old cycles of past-present are cut.
9. *citshakti* = the power of *cit*/Awareness (34). We are established in the power of the *cit*. This is what Theos Bernard describes: "What the mind accomplishes is of little consequence, what matters is that the inner self should experience an accession of power, that universal energy called *cit*, which is the life source of the individual."

NOTES ON CHAPTER 4

4.1

There are 5 different ways in which the fruits described in YS Chapter 3 can come:

1. Some people are born with this ability (*janma*).
2. Through taking certain herbs in a special way (*oshadhi*). [N.B. The special way is no longer known. Taking herbs without doing it in this special way and without special preparation is dangerous.]
3. Chanting (*mantra*) can change one's state of mind. The chanting can be very complex.
4. Austerities (*tapas*) can bring power and change perceptions. This is why *tapas* is mentioned as a tool in YS 2.1. *Tapas* needs to be linked to a purpose, so that the heat can be redirected. There has to be reflection as well as restraint; you have to reflect on the effect of the restraint on yourself and on others.
5. the practice of yoga (*samadhi*). N.B. The practice of *tapas* also appears in yoga, but it's a different kind of *tapas* - it appears in a different context [in YS 2].

4.2

Patanjali talks about the process of how something changes. The possibilities are already there: it's up to you to make the changes. So we all have the potential for change. This change is a rearrangement of what already exists. You can expose different people to the same influences, and they will respond or change in different ways.

4.3

We all have the same potential for change. We are, metaphorically speaking, all made of the same clay. To make something different out of this clay, a wheel is needed, but this is no use without a potter; the skill of the potter is crucial.

Patanjali uses the word *nimitta* = cause for change; in the "clay" metaphor, the potter is *nimitta*. *Nimitta* can be many things - *dharma* or *duhkha* for example. To start with, *nimitta* is an external force, but this external force must itself also be linked to some *nimitta*; e.g. in early life, our teachers, parents or friends can be *nimitta*. The best *nimitta* is your teacher. The teacher's role is to lead you to your own internal *nimitta*; the teacher will assess you and provide you with appropriate tools.

The mind is **not** the *nimitta* in yoga. Yoga uses 4 terms to describe the internal *nimitta*:

1. *drshtr* = Seer - it sees everything, but always perceives through the mind, therefore what it sees is coloured by the mind;
2. *purusha* = Dweller in the City - the city being the mind, body and senses;
3. *atma* = Essence
4. *cit* = Awareness - the quality of awareness depends on the quality of the mind.

The purpose of yoga is to turn the mind from looking out to looking in. The mind will fill with anything. When you begin to turn the mind round to look inward, at first the mind will fill with itself and its own rubbish. The way forward is stated in YS 2.1, and requires changes in practice, lifestyle and attitude.

4.4

A person who has contact with his/her own *nimitta* will have the ability to influence other people - i.e. this person can change other people's states of mind. The link between teacher and student is *asmita* (the experience of awareness). The more open the awareness the stronger the link.

(N.B. *asmita* is also one of the *kleshas*. What the word *asmita* really means is "when two things are as one". When these two things are mind and external object, *asmita* is a *klesha*. When the two things are mind and the inner self, this is what is meant by *asmita* in YS 4.4.

4.5

One teacher has several students. The teaching is the same; but each student's response will be different. The expectations and state of mind of the student are an important factor, and these can differ at different times.

4.6

The state of mind and potential of the teacher also vary and thus produce varying results. The self-interest, motivation and integrity of a teacher are also important factors. The role of the teacher is to help the students find their *nimitta*.

4.7

Karma - actions create fruits. These fruits can be black, white, grey or have no colour. Every action and thought has some effect in the universe, which eventually comes back to the performer of the action. Black fruits have a negative comeback; white fruits have a positive comeback; most fruits are in fact grey and have a pretty nondescript comeback; those that have no colour are the result of actions at the highest level, free of self-interest.

4.8

Actions produce fruits; fruits produce seeds (*vasana*). The seeds stay with us. We act with motivation of some kind; the motivation has some effect. Therefore our motivations have to be as desirable as possible.

Bhagavad Gita 17.20-22 talks about 3 kinds of giving:

1. **tamasic** giving: this is done at the wrong place or wrong time, the recipient doesn't deserve it; or the giving is not done with respect;
2. **rajasic** giving: something given in return for the past, something given with thought of the future, something given grudgingly, something given that is useless or inauspicious;
3. **sattvic** giving: not expecting any return, not given to repay or create a debt, given at the proper time or proper place, what is given should have been properly earned by the giver.

4.9

Vasana and memory are linked in spite of time; *vasana* are never destroyed; they can sneak up on us when we are not steady - hence the importance of practice to help us cope with *vasana* when they arise.

4.10

Vasana have no beginning, no end, because behind them is the desire to survive, to live, to possess (and therefore at some fundamental level we are insecure). The will to live gives motivation for our actions.

[RECAP: *vasana* will provoke us to act. How we act is *samskara* = habit (e.g. yoga practice is a *samskara*, to prepare the mind). You can't change the *vasana*, but you can impose another *samskara* over one(s) you don't want.

Attitude is nothing but attitude. If you change your attitude, you lay down another *samskara*.

The mind learns through habits. So by changing habits you can change the mind. Yoga is a way of taking the steps to initiate change. It's a preparation.]

4.11

Personally, we can do nothing with this desire to live. But we **can** do something about the way it affects us. There are 4 ways in which the past is triggered and supported:

1. misapprehension or cause/origin (*hetu*)
2. attachment to the fruits of actions (*phala*)
3. state of mind (*asraya*)
4. external stimuli (*alambanaih*).

These "four pillars" are constantly reinforced by *vasana* and *samskara*. Which of them is easiest to remove?

External influences (no. 4) can be hard to remove, because even trying to remove them doesn't work. Cause/origin (no. 1) can't be easily removed - what influences you is not the cause itself, but the memory of how you felt at the time. You have to recognise and respect the cause, if you want to move forward. Fruits (no. 2) may be immediate or long term, so it's hard to anticipate them. So the best one to work with is state of mind: if this is changed, the effects of the other three are lessened.

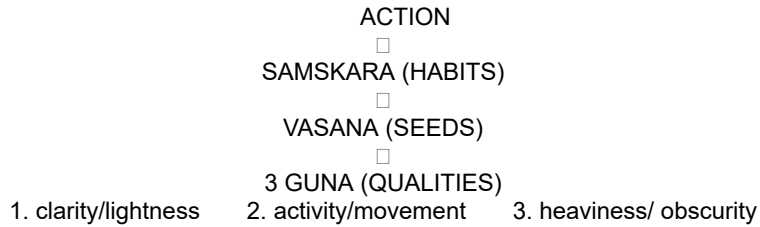
You alter state of mind by practice, attitude and lifestyle (see note no YS 4.3). This is why the first and second steps in the eight limbs - the *yamas* and *niyamas* - are about how you behave.

4.12

The past and future are latent in the present. (*Bhagavad Gita* says every action can become a cleansing - a preparation for the future.) The future depends on our present state of mind and circumstances.

4.13

How is it that past present and future are present at one time? Because of the *guna*:



We have some control over the *guna*. They always affect our state of mind, but we can influence and change them. They can rearrange themselves; at any given time one is dominant, but the other two are still there. e.g. For refreshing sleep, *tamas* (supported by *sattva*) has to be dominant; for positive action, *rajas* (if possible supported by *sattva*) should be dominant. However, when *sattva* is not dominant, there is always the possibility of error.

4.14

At any given time what you see is just one combination of the *guna*, with one dominant.

4.15

The same thing is seen as different by different people. This is because different minds are in different states. Each mind also has its own *samskaras*. A sattvic mind has clarity/discrimination (*viveka*), which would at least allow such a mind to be aware of different possible perceptions. [See YS 1.7-8 on how perception actually works.]

4.16

So if everyone sees something differently, how do we know this object isn't just an extension of our mind? Whether the perception is consistent or inconsistent, this doesn't invalidate the existence of the object. The object exists - things are real.

4.17

However, our perception of the object depends on our state of mind. We perceive it because a) it is present; b) it "glitters".

4.18

Where does the impulse for action come from?

JNANAM knowledge/wisdom

CIT □

ICCHA desire

□

KRIYA action

CITTA □

PHALA fruit

According to yoga, mind is just matter; so mind cannot wish. The impulse comes from something deeper. Perception comes through the mind (YS 2.23); so the quality of perception depends on the state of the mind. The Seer sees through the mind:

The role of everything we see is not to serve the **mind**, but to serve the **Seer**. That includes the mind itself, as the mind itself is part of matter (YS 2.21).

Perception is always through the mind. The state of perception depends on the state of the mind. The only time perception is not there is when you are in deep sleep (really a kind of tamasic *samadhi*).

The Seer: there is something that knows what's happening. The mind and body change throughout life, but there is something constant that observes the change and follows its pattern. We are usually unaware of the Seer because there is something in between. We can become aware of the Seer if/when the mind becomes filled with the Seer.

The eight processes of understanding:

1. come near to it (*upadesha*)
2. listen to it (*shravanam*)
3. hold/grasp it (*grahana*)
4. stay with it (*dharanam*)
5. reflect on it (*mananam*)
6. live it/put it into practice (*anusthanam*)
7. have some experience (*anubhavanam*)
8. how we share it (*pracaram*)

4.19

The mind is a dark room full of memories, requiring light from another source. Or - the mind is a mirror reflecting light from another source. The mind is part of the Seen. (The Seen includes mind, the senses, and things outside.) Unless a direction is given by the *Purusha*/Seer, the mind cannot function. (Even so there are times when the mind cannot or will not perform as directed! There are times when *rajas* or *tamas* are dominant.)

Characteristics of the *Purusha*:

1. first step in all action
2. witness of action
3. able to locate defects
4. deep reflection occurs through the *Purusha*
5. it glows by itself (Upanishadic idea of *Atman* shining in the cave of the heart)
6. origin of saying "I know" is *Purusha*.

The dominant energy in the mind is always rajasic. *Sattva* has to be cultivated. In yoga, *pranayama* is the prime practice for cultivating *sattva* in the mind. The best way to raise *sattva* is to reduce *rajas* and *tamas*; the problem is *tamas*, because you can't see it.

4.20-21

The mind also has a reality. It is the same mind in a succession of moments. For if it was a different mind it would have no memory.

4.22

When the mind is not linked to objects, it takes the form of *cit*. This requires training, to get the mind to turn around (from external objects to internal). How do we do this? By practice and meditation.

4.23

The mind has a dual role: it presents what's outside to the Seer (in this role it is *manas*); it fills itself with the Seer (i.e. enlightenment) (in this role it is *citta*). But the mind can only do one thing at a time. Mind has the capacity to gather new impressions despite being filled with its own impressions.

4.24

Although mind is filled with its own impressions it can always be at the disposal of the *cit*.

4.25

When you really become one with that feeling of the essence, then you no longer need to search, or ask, "What is soul?" When Jung was asked, "How do you know there is a god?" he replied, "There is a seeking until there is a knowing. When there is a knowing, there is no longer a seeking."

4.26

"Discrimination (*viveka*) is in the front of the mind." This provides a link between *cit* and *citta*. (So, *heyam duhkham anagamam*. = Future suffering should be avoided. YS 2.16) Mind naturally gravitates towards freedom.

4.27

But *samskara* are still there, and a small breach can let in a lot of water. See YS 2.26 - unwavering discrimination is necessary. The past can worm its way skilfully into the present; feelings can arise, and those feelings bring *samskaras*.

4.28

We have a *samskara* for awareness - but there can still be breaks. So what to do? Refer back to YS 2.1, which defines *kriya yoga*. Kriya yoga gives a feeling for *samadhi*. It reduces the way the *klesha* affect us.

4.29

We have some attachment to the fruits of clarity. But eventually even the positive attachments (including attachment to clarity) have to be dropped. That's why YS 1.50 says there are positive *samskara* that can block negative ones; and YS 1.51 says that even the positive *samskara* have to be dropped. Then you get "*dharmameghah samadhih*". In this state there is nothing to be known, nothing to be sought, nothing to be gained, and nothing to be realised. At this point the *vasana* are no longer active - "the seeds are burnt".

4.30

After radical transformation the *klesha* cycle ceases to trouble us. (See YS 1.24)

4.31

Three things are of interest to people:

1. What's inside me?
2. What's outside me?
3. What's beyond me?

But now, nothing remains to be known. The mind is not clouded with the normal drives.

4.32

We are no longer affected by the *guna* (See YS 1.16). Also, the patterning of the *guna* stops.

4.33

When change stops, the mind has the ability to recognise the process of change. The mind experiences a series of moments; but because the replacement of each one happens so fast, we don't see it (e.g. cartoon film). But the mind is constant, even with change. When you step back mentally, you can see the series of moments, and time seems to change its nature.

4.34

[It is traditional not to discuss the last sutra/verse of a text being studied!]

