



Yogic Practices to Clarify and to Elucidate The Mind According to Patanjali Yoga Sutra

Vidhi Manek

The Indian Planetary Society (IPS) B-201, L. T. Road, Borivali (W), Mumbai-400092, India

yumanek@gmail.com

(Received Jun 2016; Published September 2016)

ABSTRACT

The present research paper is to become aware of the sources and causes of unnecessary impressions (samskaras) which reduce the capacity of mind, and Yogic practices to eliminate that load resulting into clear, efficient, elucidated mind according to Patanjali Yoga Sutras. The research also attempts to correlate the techniques to the specific causes and gain insights into the effects of those techniques on the mind and thereby discovering ways and means to lead a peaceful life. A fundamental study of Patanjali Yoga Sutras was done for this research work. Contemplative research has found that if one applies any of given technique to his life, he can achieve tranquility of mind and thus elucidate the mind also.

Keywords: Mind, Yoga, Kriya yoga, Chitta Prasadnam

DOI:10.14331/ijfpss.2016.330061

INTRODUCTION

We all regularly clean up the junk and residual files from our smart phones and computing systems to manage their memory and RAM well and thus ensure their optimum processing capacity but very few of us take care of our own memory and processing, cognitive capacity. First, one needs to identify the sources, causes and effects of such junk residual impressions of one's mind. This study is to throw light on the topic which affects almost all of us. In recent times we are continuously in contact with the various sources of trash- though most of the times unconsciously- such as too many late nights at the work place, stress full work environment, stressed relations, anxiety and frustration due to long commutes, competitiveness in schools, colleges, offices etc. And if not so the television and our other electronic gadgets do the same for us by throwing emotional dramas, negative news from all over the world, virtual fighting games etc. One comes to know about this only when all these impressions stored in his/her psyche create chaos in our physical, psychological and nervous systems and manifest in various psychosomatic disorders. Our unstable, running, wandering, excited, weak, and sick mind gets manifested in various psychosomatic disorders like headache,

backache, stomachache, acidity, gas trouble, asthma, insomnia, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome, hypertension, cardiac issues, diabetes etc.(Vyavahare, 2006).

MIND

The mind is a set of cognitive faculties including consciousness, perception, thinking, judgment, and memory. It holds the power of imagination, recognition, and appreciation, and is responsible for processing feelings and emotions, resulting in attitudes and actions. There is no universally agreed definition of a mind and its distinguishing properties, although there is a lengthy tradition of its inquiries in philosophy, religion, psychology, and cognitive science. ("Mind,").

Understanding the human mind is at the core of psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. According to him the human mind is contained in three levels of awareness or consciousness. They are the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. The two functions of the conscious mind are its ability to direct our focus and its ability to imagine that which is not real. The subconscious is the storage point for any recent memories needed for quick recall. The unconscious mind is

where all of our memories and past experiences reside. The holistic view of these levels make the picture clear that how trash of emotions, impressions and different notions stored at

different level of memories can create chaos and adversely affect our focusing and processing capacities.

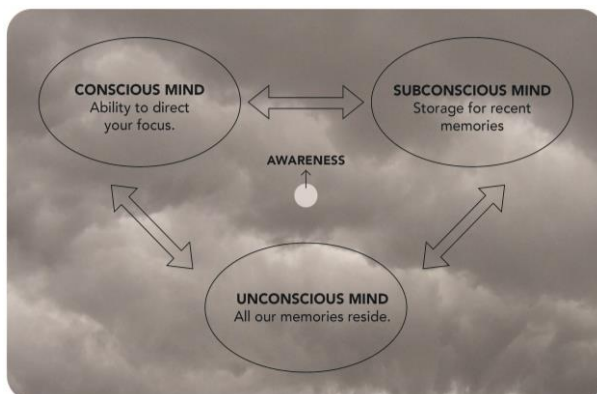


Fig 1. Clouded Mind (mind loaded with memories and impressions) with obscured awareness

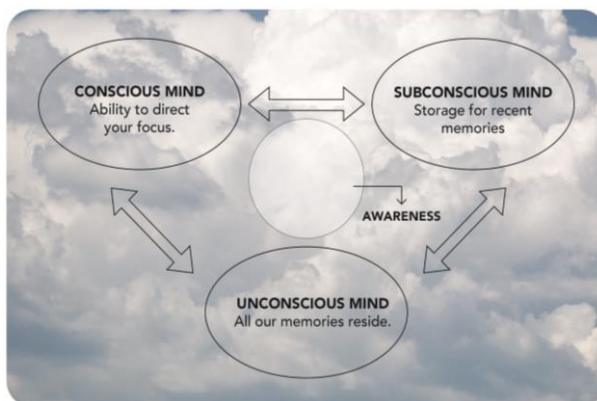


Fig 2. Clearer mind (with reduced impressions) and expanded awareness

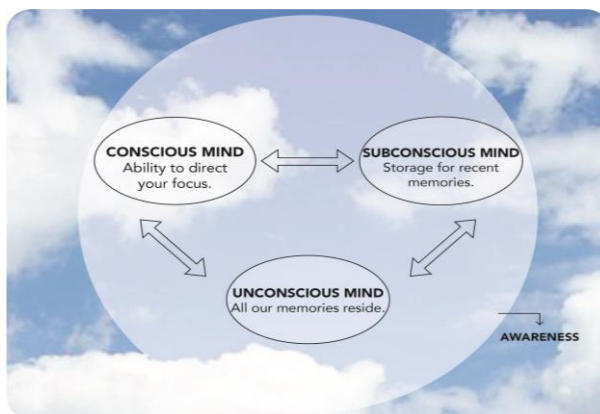


Fig 3. Even more clear mind and heightened awareness

YOGA PHOLISOPHY AND PATANJALI YOGA SUTRA

Yoga is both a system of philosophy, one of the six Indian Vedic philosophies, and a technology for psychosomatic-spiritual development. Yoga as a method is possibly much older than as a philosophy even though in some ways the two

are intertwined (Singh & Mukesh, 2010). Sutras literally mean aphorisms. Patanjali Yoga-Sutras (PYS) is in four parts. In it we find a systematic presentation of yoga both in its theoretical and practical aspects. It is a unified exposition of a metapsychological theory and an applied psychology of the

human mind, offering profound possibilities for personal transformation and growth (Rao, 2014).

In Yoga, the term for functional mind is chitta. Chitta comprises of the cognitive processes, the ego, the senses and the instinctual tendencies inherited from vasanas and samskaras (inherited from previous lives and effects of past actions). Samskaras and vasanas tend to color our cognitions and predispose us to behave in certain ways. Chitta manifests also volitional activity, which enables it to attend to some objects and not to others. In addition, chitta has shakti (latent power), which can be used to guide and control the course it would take. Shakti enables chitta to “reflect and react back upon itself and change the passivity of its transformations into active states associated with will and effort” (Dasgupta, 1930). Chitta is thus seat of one’s cognition, volition, feelings and actions (Rao, 2014). Three levels of functioning of chitta are distinguished - buddhi (psyche), ahamkara (ego, the empirical self), and manas (the mental apparatus). Manas is the central processor, which selectively reflects on the material provided by senses. Ahamkara appropriates what is provided by manas as one’s own and considers the object of perception in reference to the perceiving person. Buddhi (intellect) then reacts to the information provided in an appropriate manner (Rao, 2014).

Yoga occurs when the machinations, vacillations, perturbations, whirling, spinning, and agitations (vrtti) of the mind-field (chitta) dissolve, cease, and become still (nirodha) (PYS 1.2). Yogic processes are designed to annihilate, still, or dissolve (nirodha) the wavelike patterning and conditioning (vrtti) of the perceiver’s mind field (chitta) so that the

unconditioned clarity can shine forth illuminating the darkness and stilling all anxiety and stress continuously - without interruption. All that is necessary is to still the vrttis which are at the root of our anxieties, bio-psyche and spiritual tensions, conflicts, stress, afflictions (kleshas), distortions of reality, and confusion. Thus, Yoga is accomplished when the self-limited thought patterns, biased programming, corruptive fragmenting fluctuations, and negative conditioning on the mind-stream, its mental faculties, and their bio-psyche processes are de-stressed and all remediated (Feuerstein, 1982).

Patanjali has enumerated five types of afflictions (kleshas). They are avidya, asmita, raga, dwesha and abhinivesha. The afflictions that cause sorrow are all caused by ignorance (avidya) of our true Self. As a result of this ignorance which veils the light of truth, ignorance and confusion further manifests as the false identification of separateness, aloneness, or egoism (asmita), attraction/attachment (raga), repulsion, dislike, hatred, anger, and aversion (dwesha), and the fear of death (abhinivesha) (PYS 2.3). Patanjali says that some vrttis are associated with klesha and others are neutral in respect to klesha. The philosophy of Kleshas which has been expounded by Patanjali in such a masterly manner in the first portion of Section II deals with the great problem of human life, completely and effectively. It goes to the root-cause of human bondage and suffering and prescribes a remedy which is not only effective but brings about a permanent cure (Taimni, 2010). At the level of consciousness from where we function, the major klesha seems to be the attachment (Raga). This can be explained as follows,

Table.1 Kleshas as in PYS and their interpretation

Kleshas	Interpretation
Raga	Attachment
Dwesha	Negative Attachment (Raga) that is repulsion, hatred
Asmita	Attachment (Raga) to the “I” ness
Abhinivesha	Attachment (Raga) to life
Avidya	Attachment (Raga) to the worldly evolutes other than real Self

Therefore one should try to deal with this Raga within us in order to elucidate one’s mind.

YOGIC METHODOLOGY

Now in the light of this introduction let us see how one can be free of these vrttis and kleshas.

The conflicts and tensions generally arise in relations with people around us, relationship with ourselves, due to impurities of the mind and afflictions (kleshas). The issues mentioned earlier in the first paragraph of introduction; all cause impurities in the mind which require to be removed in order to better functioning of the mind. Let us see these techniques in detail.

Table.2 Yogic Practices To Resolve The Conflicts And Calm The Mind

Conflicts	Yogic Practices (Techniques)
Relations with people	Chitta Prasadnam
Relationship with Self	Pratipaksha Bhavana
Impurities of Mind	Ashtang Yoga
Kleshas	Kriya Yoga

Abhyasa and Vairagya are necessary for all the yogic practices.

Chitta prasadnam

The four fold practices given here by Patanjali can cultivate positive attitudes towards circumstances and can lead to non-conflicting relations with people around us.

Table.3 The four fold practice of Chitta Prasadnam (PYS 1.33)

	Feelings	Towards Sphere of
I	Friendliness	Pleasure and towards those who have experienced happiness
II	Compassion	Pain and towards those who are in distress
III	Joy	Virtue and towards those who are treading the path of virtue
IV	Indifference	Vice and towards those who are steeped in vice by overlooking their faults

One of the greatest sources of disturbance to the mind is our uncontrolled reactions to our human environment, to what people do around us and to the pleasant or unpleasant conditions in which we get involved. The result of following the rule given in this Sutra is to bring about clarification of the mind and to remove one of the causes of mental disturbance (Taimni, 2010).

Pratipaksha Bhavana

In respect of codes of conduct in society and codes of self-discipline if/when one experiences feelings of hatred and is agonized by fiery passions which lead to wrong course of conduct; (such as 'I shall kill him who hurts me, I shall speak untruth, I shall take/steal these things, I shall commit adultery with someone's wife,') constant pondering over the opposites is the remedy (PYS 2.33). All these existing negative feedback loops can be effectively balanced out and nullified (Pratipaksha Bhavana) by the application of social code of conducts (yama) and codes of self-discipline (niyama) described in Sutras 2.30-2.32. The rationale of this technique for overcoming bad habits and undesirable tendencies, whether they relate to action, feeling or thinking lies in the fact that all evil tendencies are rooted in wrong habits of thought and attitudes and, therefore, the only effective means of removing them completely and permanently is to attack the trouble at its source and alter the thoughts and attitudes which underlie the undesirable manifestations. An undesirable mental habit can be changed only by replacing it by a mental habit of an exactly opposite kind - hatred by love, dishonesty by uprightness. New and desirable mental channels are created by the new thoughts in which mental energy begins to flow in ever increasing measure, starving and gradually replacing the undesirable habits of thoughts and the wrong attitudes which are derived from them (Taimni, 2010) and eventually one's conduct can be corrected.

Ashtang Yoga

The art and science of Yoga is systematically described in eight (*ashta*) rungs, steps, or limbs (*anga*) called Ashtang Yoga. It is an efficient mean to clear the mind from unnecessary stuff. They are as follows,

1. Yama: Social observances/codes of conduct (PYS 2.30, 2.31). It refers to the five abstentions: how we relate to the external world.

- Ahimsa- Non-violence, inflicting no injury or harm to others or even to one's own self, it goes as far as nonviolence in thought, word and deed.

- Satya- Non-illusion; truth in word and thought.

- Asteya- Non-covetousness, non-stealing.

- Brahmacharya- Moderation in sensual and sexual pleasure. It also means that we don't use this energy in any way that might harm others.

- Aparigraha- Non-accumulation of unnecessary things.

2. Niyama- Personal observances/codes of discipline, self-training (PYS 2.32). It refers to the five observances; how we relate to ourselves, the inner world.

- Shaucha: cleanliness of body and mind.

- Santosha: contentment; satisfied with what one has.

- Tapas: austerity and associated observances for body discipline and thereby mental control.

- Swadhyaya: study of the Self

- Ishvara pranidhana: total surrender to (or worship of) God.

3. Asana: Steady and comfortable postures catering primarily to physical and physiological health; meditation posture (PYS 2.46-2.48)

4. Pranayama: awareness, control and expansion of breath (and prana) through breathing techniques/practices (PYS 2.49-2.53)

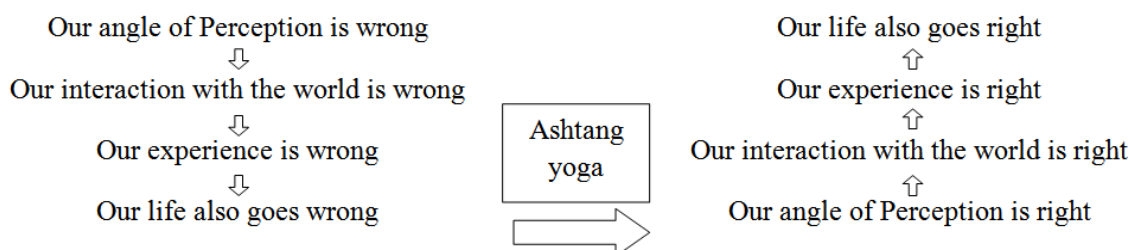
5. Pratyahara: withdrawal of the senses from their pre-occupation with the external world (PYS 2.54-2.55)

6. Dharana- Concentration (PYS 3.1)

7. Dhyana: meditation (PYS 3.2)

8. Samadhi: Perfect integration of personality (PYS 3.3)

Ashtang Yoga is said to be the most efficient and holistic means to clear and elucidate one's mind for those who practice it reverently and regularly. Here impurities of mind do not mean only wrong knowledge but also actions done under its influence and the latent impressions thereof. Practice of Yoganaga implies action, based on right knowledge, which destroys actions based on wrong knowledge and leads to the development of right knowledge. Right knowledge eradicates wrong knowledge. With the total annihilation of misapprehension, mind becomes crystal clear. Thus practice of yoga becomes the cause of emancipation (Aranya, 1963).



Ashtang Yoga of Patanjali is holistic in nature. It caters to all dimensions of human personality; the social, physical, physiological, mental, vital, intellectual and spiritual.

Kriya yoga

Kriya Yoga is yoga of action. In the context of our study, it is imperative to practice Kriya Yoga to attenuate the afflictions (kleshas) which are the biggest agency of agitation in mind with awareness of the basic principles of Practice (Abhyasa) and Detachment (Vairagya). Tapas (spiritual passion, energy, or heat generated through forgoing dissipative activities), swadhyaya (study of the Self), and Ishvara pranidhana [the function of surrender to or the embrace of the all-encompassing comprehensive integrity which interconnects us all (who we really are)] are the three essential prerequisite (kriya) activities that lead us to realizing the fruit of yoga (PYS 2.1).

Abhyasa, Vairagya

Practice (Abhyasa) and renunciation (Vairagya) are the most common means for all the yogic practices (PYS 1.12). Sutras 1.12-1.16 introduce the two proficient remedies that dissolve, remove, and/or eliminate vrttis. Here vairagya is the continuous practice of letting go, non-attachment, or non-expectation. Abhyasa is the efforts - for prolonged period with perseverance, without any break and with full faith and respect towards it - taken to reside in the state of undisturbed calmness of the mind. As the practice improves, the tranquility also improves. The continuity of the mind devoid of all fluctuations is called the highest state of tranquility. In any case, in this sutra Patanjali states that by releasing our hold on things that hold us back -- things of the past as well as fixations (expectations) upon the future and especially the way the mind grasps onto 'objects' we can achieve a thirst less/desire less state which in its positive side provides fulfillment and completion (PYS 1.15). Vairagya is a release or simply non-attachment of any anticipation and hence anxiety also departs. On a simple level, vairagya is the acceptance of the present without anticipation, apprehension, fear, desire, longing, expectation, or even preference.

REFERENCES

Agrawal, G. (2013). A Review of the Psychological Benefits of Yoga. *International Journal of Yoga and Allied Sciences*.

Maharishi Patanjali has also given some more techniques to bring forth tranquility of mind as,

- One can clarify and stabilize his mind through controlling the expiration and retention of (breath) energy (PYS 1.34). These exercises however should be practiced under expert supervision. This technique is useful for steadying the mind-stuff (Woods, 1914).

- Or [he gains stability when] a sense-activity arises connected with an object [and] bringing the central-organ (mind) into a relation of stability (PYS 1.35). This technique is again also useful for steadying the mind-stuff (Woods, 1914).

- Or an undistressed [and] luminous [sense-activity when arisen brings the central-organ into a relation of stability] (PYS 1.36). This technique ponders upon the self (Woods, 1914).

- Or the mind-stuff [reaches the stable state] by having as its object [a mind-stuff] freed from passion (PYS 1.37), (Woods, 1914).

- Or [the mind-stuff reaches the stable state] by having as the supporting-object a perception in dream or in sleep (PYS 1.38), (Woods, 1914)

- Or [the mind-stuff reaches the stable state] by contemplation upon any such an object as is desired (PYS 1.39), (Woods, 1914)

CONCLUSION

If one can pick up a technique which best suits him/her and follow it, he/she is sure to benefit from it. Yoga has potential to relieve stress, anxiety and depression is beyond doubt. Yoga, in and of its own nature, is naturally a form of psychology (Agrawal, 2013). From the above it is obvious that various yogic techniques can cure mental disorders and can attain complete mental health. Here it would be appropriate to quote world renowned yoga teacher Desikachar, "The point of Yoga is to keep the mind clear of its built up impressions... and yoga is to give mind its best possible form". I hope this paper opens up more and more insights and saves our species from the clutches of epidemics of lifestyle diseases occurring due to unconscious accumulation of impurities in the mind.

Aranya, H. (1963). *Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali with Bhasvati*. Calcutta: Shri Pradip Kr. Ghosh, Calcutta University Press.

- Dasgupta, S. (1930). *Yoga Philosophy in Relation to other Systems of Indian Thought*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta.
- Feuerstein, G. (1982). *The Yoga-sūtra of Patañjali: A new translation and commentary*. Mind. from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind>
- Rao, K. R. (2014). *Cultivating Consciousness*. Visakhapatnam: GITAM University Press.
- Singh, S. P., & Mukesh, Y. (2010). *Yoga: From Confusion to Clarity, vol.1: Foundations of Yoga*. New Delhi: Standard Publishers.
- Taimni, I. K. (2010). *The Science of Yoga*. Adyar, Chennai, India: The Theosophical Publishing House.
- Vyavahare, Y. S. (2006). *Yoga for Health Healing and Harmony*. Thane, Maharashtra, India: Ghantali Mitra Mandal.
- Woods, J. H. (1914). *The Yoga-System of Patanjali*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banaras