

*Introduction to the
Philosophy of Patanjali*

by

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Lecture 2. Edited from a talk
given on 2nd August, 1977.

CAMBRIDGE YOGA PUBLICATIONS

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Therapeutics has four aspects: the symptom, the cause of the symptom, the cure leading to a state of health, and the means by which we come to the cure and so to a state of health.

The symptom has already been described as pain or suffering or dissatisfaction — in short, 'that which is to be avoided' — but we do not immediately see the nature of pain. Each one of us has a different form of suffering or dissatisfaction to cope with and, as a result, we see pain only partially in a fragmented way.

But the more one progresses into Yoga, the more obvious it becomes that pain is all-pervasive. Why? Because of the nature of the mind and the way it functions.

The mind is constantly changing and the outcome of this change is suffering and pain, first as a want — because the mind suddenly desires something it did not desire before, then as a loss if the object of that desire cannot be found, then as imprint because each experience leaves a mark upon the mind, and finally as change as the three threads from which the mind are woven, the white, the red and the black, seek predominance over the others. The state of the mind changes according to the changes in predominance of these three threads. All these then, are sources of suffering.

We are now going to look at the second aspect of therapeutics — the cause of the symptom, of pain. Why is it that change affects us in a painful way? Why do we suffer or feel dissatisfaction from these movements of the mind?

The answers to these questions involve a field of investigation which is a little more theoretical than usual and so perhaps more difficult to understand but I think if we can grasp it, it will be of practical help to us in understanding how Yoga can help us to remove the symptom by removing the cause of the symptom. And that means moving from disease to health, from fragmentation to wholeness and from the known to an understanding of the unknown.

So what is the cure for this suffering or dissatisfaction? If we observe ourselves, we can see that we are changing. Not only the mind changes and causes pain but the body also changes. It has moved from childhood to youth and maturity and will — or already does — know old age. These are changes at an obvious level.

The states of the mind fluctuate from one moment to the next and even that more permanent part of the mind which I call the 'I' or 'Me' is changing. Although this change is less noticeable, the 'I' or 'Me' part of the mind is never quite the same as it was when we were younger or even ten days ago.

The external world we observe is also changing. Some things may continue to look much the same for a while but if we came back in two hundred years and looked again that would not be so. All things are changing. Or are they? Is there something that does not change? Yes, there is.

Although we cannot physically verify the answer to this question with our eyes, Yoga says that we can understand, at least, intellectually, that there is something which does not change because to be aware of change or movement at all we must first be aware of something which is changeless or stationary. If a river had no banks, we could not be aware of movement or change in the water. So we need something stable in order to compare that which is static and that which is not.

If we can realise that we are changing and that the world about us is also changing, then there must be something in us which is not. Of course, reaching this intellectual understanding does not mean we can automatically see and live and be in touch with this changeless dimension. It is only a pointer, an indication that something changeless must exist.

If we observe ourselves, we are perfectly aware that the state of our minds is changing from happy to unhappy or from clear to confused and back again. So what is it exactly, what is the state or entity or dimension that allows us this awareness of change.

Some people would say it was memory but Yoga says it cannot be because memory itself is changing. At one time we may remember something and at another we don't, or we remember something one day and the next we remember it slightly differently. The quality of memory is also changing and is not something permanent so it is not the memory of ourselves yesterday that is aware of ourselves as we are today.

So what of this changeless dimension? If we can grasp intellectually that it does exist, is it possible to come into close contact with it? The answer is 'no'. It is not possible — at least, not as we are now.

Why? Well, because whatever we perceive is a mixture of the instrument through which we perceive it, which is the mind, and that which allows the instrument to function at all which is this thing that does not change.

That means the observations we make are always a mixture of two things, the dimension which changes and the dimension which does not. We are both these dimensions. We are the body, we are the mind and we are this changeless something else. All these things are mixed together and we cannot see them separately. We can only perceive the mixture as we are.

Yoga says it is possible to come to another perception of ourselves but that requires the whole transformation involved through Yoga. This perception is not something that is given to us and, as we are, neither a child nor an adult can have a separate perception of these two dimensions. It is always a mixture of the two.

Even if we sit very quietly with our bodies still and our minds more or less still and catch a glimpse of this changeless dimension, there are still sensations coming to us from outside or inside in the form of thoughts and emotion. The dimension which is changing is always interfering with the dimension which is changeless and we are not able to separate the two.

Yoga says that this mixture, this conjunction of the two dimensions, 'what I am' and 'what I feel I am', is the cause of pain. Even if we worked towards increasing the dominance of Satva, the white thread of the mind, we would not gain the resulting clarity, peace and tranquility for very long because Satva, too, belongs to the dimension of change.

The only way out of pain is to make a distinction between the changing and the unchanging dimensions so that we can then see clearly and separately that stable part and that unstable part in us.

Perhaps some of us are puzzled at this stage. On one hand the word yoga is said to come from the root yuj, which means to yoke — to unite — therefore yoga is the union of two separate principles — and on the other hand, here, it is said that it is also union which is the cause of pain. A peculiar form of union — called conjunction — between the changeless stable dimension and the changing, unstable one. It is important to understand that there are different explanations given to Yoga and that the one Patanjali chooses to give in the second chapter explains that there is this conjunction and that it is the cause of pain, of suffering. We shall discuss later whether that conjunction is real or unreal but it is nevertheless the cause of suffering.

Let me try and explain in more detail the Seen and the Seer. According to Yoga and Sankhya — which is another point of view linked with Yoga — the universe, the totality of the cosmos, whatever you like to call it, is made out of twenty-five principles. The word 'principles' is taken from the Sanskrit word meaning 'Thatness' and you will all understand what 'Thatness' is. There are, then twenty-five of these 'Thatnesses' principles. One is the Seer, the changeless dimension, and the other twenty-four are the Seen or changing dimension.

Furthermore, the universe, the seen, can exist in two conditions, the manifest and the non-manifest. It moves from one to the other and never stays permanently in one condition. It is created and exists for some time in a manifest form and then returns to the non-manifest state in which it existed before.

In its non-manifest form it is not perceptible and I am not going to dwell on its nature apart from saying that it is one of the elements. However, the three threads from out of which the fabric of the universe is woven also exist in this non-manifest condition but in a state of equilibrium. In the manifest universe, these three threads are not in equilibrium, each one trying to predominate over the other in a constant movement for supremacy. It is this rivalry, this fight between the three threads that is responsible for the different phenomena that we see inside and outside ourselves.

But in the non-manifest state of the universe the three threads, the white, the red and the black, are all of exactly the same strength and counterbalance and neutralise each other. And so there is no manifestation. But whenever there is some element that disturbs this equilibrium, the manifestation of the universe begins.

What is the disturbing element? It is the Seer. The proximity of the Seer creates an imbalance between the three threads and the world starts to be created. Actually, it is an evolution or emanation (a turning outwards) from the non-manifest to the manifest rather than a creation and eventually it is an involution or resorption (a turning inwards) that begins the return to the starting point.

Now we don't want to get into too much detail about these evolutes because we cannot perceive them through our senses. They are not within our reach and so don't concern us too much.

I do, however, just want to mention the first and second evolutes, here. The first evolute is called the Great and the Intelligence. It occurs at the moment of manifestation when the white thread, Satva, predominates. Its nature is clarity and intelligence. From that the second evolute is called the 'I Maker', the ego principle, and from that come the other evolutes including the first five subtle elements, called Monads.

This great principle, the 'I Maker' and the five subtle elements are not within the reach of human understanding in its normal state of consciousness but they are the cause of all we perceive which in turn is made out of eleven sensorial organs; firstly, the five sensory organs of action — the hands that grasp, the tongue that allows speech, the foot which allows movement, the anus which allows elimination, and the genital organ which allows reproduction; secondly, the five organs of perception — the ears to hear, the eyes to see, the nose to smell, the tongue to taste and the skin to feel; and finally, the eleventh sensorial organ or the inner organ — the mind.

According to Yoga the mind is not separate. It has the same nature as the other sense organs and the other sense organs are not separated from the mind but are part of it.

The mind has three functions or aspects. The first function is to turn the many different impulses it receives into a single complete message. The word that defines this function comes from the root which means 'To think' although it is not thinking as we define it today. If, for instance, I touch a chair, the skin transmits certain impulses and certain stimuli to the brain. At the same time my "eye" looks at the shape and colour of the chair and also transmits its messages to the brain. I might also be able to taste the chair if I put my tongue on it and so on. Different stimuli come to the brain and it is the first function of the mind to combine them all together and reach the conclusion that the object in front of me is a chair and it is made of this, this and that.

The second function of the mind — and we all know it very well — personalises experience. It attributes an experience to the experiencer, an observation to the observer, a perception to the perceiver. This function is the 'I Maker', the ego maker.

The third function of the mind is described by a word meaning to 'Awake'-Intelligence. Understanding and also will. I'll try and explain it more clearly. My senses first perceived our object, the chair. This perception in the form of a number of different messages to the brain is not immediately understandable and has to be interpreted by the mind. The interpretation it reaches is called Manas. That perception is now felt as 'I see a chair' or 'yes, there is a chair in front of me'. This element of 'I'ness is the second function of the mind. The third function now says 'I would like to sit down on that chair so I'm going to move from here to there'. It is an understanding of the nature and function of the chair, of the situation in which I find myself, and the will to change that situation. So it is not only understanding but also will. These then are the three functions of the mind.

Now the whole of the universe as we see it is made up of combinations of these functions of the mind. The mind is both the instrument through which we perceive the universe and an object in itself which we are capable of perceiving. But because of the 'I Maker' function we do not see that it is only an instrument and we identify with it by saying 'I' see, 'I' feel, 'I' like, 'I' dislike, 'I' am born, 'I' die. So we don't see our real nature, only a mixture of our real nature and the mind. The ten sense organs, five to perceive and five to act, form an appendix of the mind so that once the third function of the mind has said 'I would like to move from here to there', the organs of action will be used to carry out the necessary movements.

There are five other evolutes I have still not described. These are the five grossest

evolutes, called the five elements. These evolutes are named after the five material elements we know, earth, fire, water, air and ether.

These evolutes are not like the material elements in that you could touch the earth evolute or swim in the water evolute. They represent the quality of manifestation of the material element they are named after. The earth evolute means gifted with solidity and the water evolute gifted with fluidity and so on. The actual earth, the actual water, the actual air are made from combinations of these five evolutes. The water we drink, for example is made from a combination of watery quality, earthly quality, fiery quality, airy quality and etherial quality.

We can never know in a normal state of consciousness the Seer or the Seen. It is not possible. We only know a mixture of the two and it is because we only know a mixture of the two that we experience suffering.

The Seen has two main forms, the manifest and the non-manifest. Its non-manifest form is the three threads — Satva, the white thread, Rajas, the red thread, and Tamas, the black thread — in a state of equilibrium, undisturbed by the contact with the Seer.

The moment there is contact, the Seen becomes manifest and it cannot be known by us as a pure entity. We know it only in its manifest state as a mixture of both Seer and Seen.

To recap, the first evolute is called the Great or the Intelligence. The second evolute is the 'I Maker', then we have the five Monads or subtle elements, then the eleven sense organs — five of action, five of perception, and the inner organ, the mind which itself has three parts, Manas which make sense of the stimuli from the sensorial organs, the 'I Maker', and the third one is Buddhi which is both understanding and will. Then we have the last five evolutes, the gross 'quality' elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether.

Now if we start from the bottom we find we have five gross elements and eleven sense organs. These are the sixteen principles that form the world as we perceive it through sensation, emotion, thought and memory via the mind and all mixed up with the gross elements and the messages coming from the other sense organs.

We perceive in everything about us the interplay of the three threads through the denser form of the five gross elements, which in turn we see as a mixture in the shape of wood, cloth, trees, of anything material. We see through the organs of perception. We act, we move through these material things with the organs of action and the perceptions we make are made coherent through one part of the mind. These are felt as belonging to the 'me' in us through the second part of the mind and they are

understood and acted upon through the third part of the mind, called **Buddhi**. Finally the mind also contains memory so that when we return somewhere we can see that this has changed or that has not changed.

Whatever we do, whether it is something we perceive externally or internally it is a combination of these last sixteen elements. Finally we have the five Monads, the Great principle and the 'I Maker'. All this is called the Seen in its manifested state. In the unmanifested state, there is no world, no universe. It is not, therefore, possible to understand it.

The Seer also is something we don't know and cannot know because it is mixed with the Seen to us. This, then, is the cause of suffering according to Yoga.

I want to stress one thing. There is nothing in the Seen which is conscious. It is only the Seer which is conscious. The Seen is unconscious. It is like a machine that is dismantled and then rebuilt but it has no feeling by itself.

However, some of the Seen is quite subtle because it has more white thread, more Satvic quality in it and so more clarity. It can look like consciousness and we may think we can perceive what it is. It is, of course, in the inner organ, the mind, and is mostly 'Ahamkara', the 'I Maker' and **Buddhi**, the intelligence, understanding and will.

It is because these two are so like consciousness that we say 'I' am born and 'I' die and so on. But the 'I' that says this is not the real I but only the 'I Maker' function of the mind talking.

Likewise, the understanding we have of ourselves when we say 'I' suffer or 'I' enjoy is a mechanical thought. It is **Bhuddi**. We may feel there is consciousness but there is not. It is simply consciousness borrowed from the Seer as a mirror borrows light from a lightbulb or from the sun. It is not its own light. The mirror is only reflecting light or consciousness from another source. In the same way the different functions of the mind may seem conscious but like the mirror, they merely reflect the consciousness of the Seer.

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