

*Introduction to the
Philosophy of Patanjali*

by

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Francois Lorin went to India in 1963; he was already practising Yoga on his own and was also interested in Buddhism. At the end of his stay, he met J. Krishnamurti, this meeting had such an impact that next year he went back to India where he had an opportunity to work with B.K.S. Iyengar. The following year he met Desikachar in Saanen and then went to Madras for an intensive course, with the view of eventually teaching Yoga.

In 1967/68 he returned with his wife to Madras for further study and he was then asked to go to teach Yoga at Krishnamurti's school in England. In 1972 they took their two children with them to Madras and since then they have lived near Marseilles where Francois takes individual and small group classes, and is also in charge of a teachers' training school for Yoga.

He has been one of the main teachers at the Zinal International Conference for the last few years. In 1977 he visited England to teach at the invitation of the Cambridge University Yoga Society returning again in 1978.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF PATANJALI

BY FRANCOIS LORIN. LECTURE 1

Whatever kind of yoga practice you do has no meaning unless it springs from the philosophy — the vital source from which all yoga practices evolve.

The main source of the yoga which I have been learning is the Patanjali Darsana which means: that point of view which has been handed down to us by Maharishi Patanjali. I'm not going to give any historical information about it because there is very little certainty about who Patanjali was, when he lived or where, but his aphorisms, the sutras, which means the thread or the string on which beads are threaded — are one of the main sources of yoga philosophy. It is not the only source, there are some others, like the Tantric texts, textbooks like the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and others but this tradition mostly refers to these sutras of Patanjali.

It is difficult to open the book and just go through it once and hope to understand its contents. It needs a lot of careful reflection. It is difficult because of its terseness. Each aphorism contains enough material for a whole book, so it needs a lot of explanation.

There are many ways of starting to study it. You can start one way according to your choice or to your knowledge or another according to your teacher's knowledge or choice, but we will look at the second chapter first because it is easier to understand. We will try to approach what yoga is through the comparison made in the second chapter.

Here yoga is compared to therapeutical science. Any true therapeutical science has four aspects. We are going to look at yoga from these aspects which it shares with all therapeutic methods. We don't want to present yoga as a therapeutic method it's just that it is a good comparison.

So — the first aspect of any therapeutic is the symptom. When the person comes to a doctor, he comes with a certain description of suffering, of pain, of disease, which are the symptoms. So the first aspect which we will have to enquire into is the symptom — “that which is to be avoided”. When you are sick and you have symptoms, you want to avoid it, you want to get rid of it. So in the same way in yoga — there are certain things that one wants to avoid, one wants to get rid of. In this lecture we will explore the first aspect.

The second aspect is what has caused those symptoms. The patient cannot know nor the doctor, unless he is very good, why those symptoms have arisen. The same in yoga — some of us will know, some of us won't know what our symptoms are. We may not even be aware that we are sick. But those of us who know they are sick may not know the cause. So the second point which is very important is — to know the cause.

The third aspect is the possible treatment — what is the cure? What is the healing? In order to decide this we have to define what health is compared with the present state of illness. Unless the doctor knows what equilibrium is, balance, health, how can he hope to cure? He must know both. He must know the symptoms, he must know the cause, he must know the cure — the healing. The third point which concerns us all very much is the treatment.

The fourth is how we go from the illness to the cure. What are the means of treatment?

Patanjali presents yoga in this way in the second chapter. It is **one** of the ways, I would repeat, you can present it. We can enter yoga in many different ways and through many different approaches but this is one of the propositions made by Patanjali and I think, a useful one as a means of exploring what yoga is.

In this description of yoga as a science of therapeutics the approach is first negative: it doesn't tell us what we should aim at, what we want to realise from yoga. They say first what we have to avoid, which is negative. That means something has to be discarded, something has to be negated and not that something has to be reached. I think this approach is very essential because if there is something to be avoided all of us should be able to see it. If there is a thorn in my sandal, unless I am completely insensitive I will know about it and will want to do something about it. Perhaps buy a better type of shoe which I may not even know about, whether it exists or where and how to get it. So it is some kind of ideal, it is something which I have no immediate relationship with. While I only need to become aware of "that which is to be avoided" to realise it's nature and it's presence. I don't need any ideal, it is something factual. So that is the approach.

Now what is it that must be avoided? I don't want to use the Sanscrit terms but it is sometimes difficult to translate exactly. I will have to use several words or examples to give the right meaning, or significance. Mostly it is translated as "pain", as "suffering", or one could say as "disatisfaction". "That which is to be avoided" is a feeling of pain, of suffering of disatisfaction.

The pain you can observe in yourself is of two types: one is the physical type of pain like toothache and the other is the psychological type of pain which has a hundred varieties. But both states, the physical and the psychological depend mostly on the mind's attitude to it. So, for yoga it is mostly psychological pain which we want to avoid, because physical pain is not avoidable. The physical organism is bound at one time or another to know pain because pain is a safeguard, the way in which life protects itself. Psychological pain is not necessarily so. We are then, asking the question whether psychological pain or suffering is necessary or is it something that we can get rid of? Yoga says it not only can be, but it should be rid of.

So the first awareness, the first wisdom, that someone who starts on the path of yoga has to attain is the awareness that something is wrong, that something is unsatisfactory. If you know your own motivations, or if you observe those of others, you will see mostly that it is that kind of motivation that brings people to yoga. Some may be conscious of it, and some not — it is a very obvious kind of pain. People may say — ‘I have come to yoga because I have backache’ or ‘because I want to lose weight’. This shows some dissatisfaction. One is not satisfied with an ache in the back, or with being overweight nor with psychological frustrations or imbalance. So this is the starting point for most people. Even those who say they have come to yoga out of curiosity have something which motivates them, although it may be quite hidden.

The simple, but most essential awareness that something is not right is necessary before one can change, otherwise one will remain satisfied and there will be no possibility of exploring what yoga is. This realisation will not remain as it was in the beginning. You may have noticed in yourself if you have practised yoga for a while that you may have come for certain reasons, motivations, purposes and as you carry on they change. Why do they change just like that? They change because you yourself are changing. In which direction are you changing? A commentator on Patanjali says “Normal people have a skin which is insensitive. Yogis — those who tread the path of yoga — their skin becomes as sensitive as the eyeball”. That means even a cobweb that falls into the eyeball will hurt. In the beginning you have a certain type of suffering because your sensitivity is at a certain level. The more you go into yoga the higher the sensitivity. This sensitivity grows and the more it grows the more the awareness of suffering — of dissatisfaction, psychological mostly — grows. Strangely enough the progression is that someone comes to yoga with a certain type of problem, and that problem may be solved through yoga but that is not the end of dissatisfaction. Some new dissatisfaction has come. “Okay, my back doesn’t ache any longer — but now what? — what is the purpose of having a good back? I mean, where does it lead to? Where shall I go with it?” That is the person feels perfectly healthy and all right but his mind is in a state of confusion. — “Have I done right?” “Have I done wrong?” “Am I in the right direction or not?” Some kind of questioning arises out of this higher sensitivity. Pain, suffering, dissatisfaction, which is the symptom of disease, is not something static. It is not always the same pain, the same dissatisfaction. It is moving, it is changing, as we change and it becomes more subtle. The more we enter into yoga the more we perceive that this dissatisfaction is a kind of inbuilt characteristic of our minds.

This sensitivity and new awareness to suffering will come to a climax when one realises that this dissatisfaction is all pervasive. The sensitivity has grown to such an extent that one realises that those objects or actions that used to be considered as pleasant or joyous also contain suffering, pain. That is why in one part of the book Patanjali says everything is pain to the one who considers things deeply.

This point of view could be seen as very pessimistic but one has to understand that this all-pervasiveness of pain exists only as long as the mind functions as it does now. That means in the normal state, in the normal human being. It is in the nature of the mind that whatever it experiences in the end will lead to pain. If the mind changes, and that is one of the purposes of yoga, pain may not be there any more but as long as the mind functions as it does now, the greater the sensitivity, the more clearly we will see that pain is all pervasive. The mind will never be satisfied or completely at peace. It is not possible.

This should not lead to despair because one can observe in oneself and in people around oneself, that the mind is in a flux. States of mind are not static. It can change. These changes can take place in two directions. It can go uphill or downhill. To realise that everything changes and that the mind also changes should give hope because if the mind can bring dissatisfaction it can also bring satisfaction if the changes are made in the right direction. Yoga is the whole set of propositions, techniques — whatever you want to call it — that help one to change in the right direction.

Now we'll see why yoga says that everything is pain when the mind functions as it does now. There are four reasons: the first is that the mind is not stable or permanently in the same condition. You may be happy and peaceful, satisfied in mind and suddenly you come across an object which changes the state of your mind. Either you want or desire that object, or you hate or want to avoid that object. This is the first kind of change the mind is subject to and that change is painful. The mind suffers from desire — it wants to get something or it wants to avoid something. This kind of change is permanent. You might see something in a shop and you want it or you may meet a person whom you feel an affinity towards and you want to stay with that person — any kind of circumstance will create that change in the mind for objects animate or inanimate in both directions (of desire and aversion). So if you realise that the mind functions in this way you know that even if you have peace and joy and happiness now it can be endangered in a moment.

The second reason why suffering or dissatisfaction is said to be all pervasive is that the mind is a kind of machine like a tape recorder. Once the tape has been recorded there is a pattern and it always functions in that way. The same sounds always come out of the tape recorder. Habit forming is part of the mind — it can get used to a person, an object, animate or inanimate. If I see your face I am happy, but if your face isn't there I feel changed. That is the kind of change that the mind goes through which produces pain through desire. Another example: I am used to a certain type of food and when I cannot get it I feel pain. There is change in the mind through loss. This is the second reason.

The third reason is that the mind is not like a blackboard. It is not something that is wiped each time it has been used. When I write something on a blackboard I

can wipe it clean immediately and it is ready to be used again once more. But the mind is not like that. Anything that is written on the mind stays there. Both the changes that make one suffer through desire or aversion and the things that make the mind suffer through loss are always imprinted on the mind leaving marks. It is the same with pleasant experiences: I hear the sound of the river and if I am quiet and have nothing to do I can listen to it with love and attention which is a very pleasant experience and this also leaves a mark.

So we find that every type of experience leaves imprints on the mind. The pleasant experience is also a cause of suffering because the imprint of that sound left in my mind — the memory — will be a source of longing, or nostalgia which I will want to get back to. I won't be able to get back to that inner state of peace and happiness so there will be pain. In the same way painful experiences are also sources of pain. For instance — a particular circumstance that may have produced confusion and disharmony in us when we were young will evoke the same pain under similar circumstances encountered later on in life and we will not be able to act properly. So the fact that the mind gathers imprints from experiences is a source of pain whether these are painful or pleasant.

We have seen that mind is a source of suffering through desire and aversion, that mind suffers because of loss and that it suffers because of the storage of impressions both pleasant and painful. The fourth reason why pain is said to be all pervasive is a little more difficult to understand because it involves something a little more abstract, something that we cannot immediately perceive in ourselves. It entails the analysis of the phenomena of the universe as it is done in the philosophy of yoga.

According to yoga the universe is like a material, a fabric which woven out of three threads. The mind, which is part of the universe, is also woven out of these three threads.

The first thread is called the white one; it is also called “that which is” or “that which shows itself forward”. The whiteness indicates that it is something luminous that can be perceived easily and “that it is” or that it “shows itself forward”. The Sanskrit word, you may know, is **sattva**. If we observe the mind when that thread is predominant there is a quality of clarity. The body is full of vitality but with quietness not with agitation. There is a lightness of feeling in the body and the senses are very quick, acute, they can see clearly, hear clearly and smell intensely. That type of feeling is said to exist when the **sattva** guna, the white thread, predominates.

The second thread is called the red one or **rajas**. It is “that which colours in red”. It is also “that which acts”, “that which executes”; “that which is responsible for action”. Now we may observe it in ourselves in a state of agitation. It is compulsory activity. Other texts compare **rajas** to a bull infuriated at the sight of another bull. This is the type of energy that in its surge forward creates anger and speed.

The third thread is called the black one, “the obscure”, “the unmovable”. When it predominates the inner feeling is one of depression, of obscurity. The body is heavy, the senses are dull. One feels tired, lazy and sleepy.

These three threads are called **gunas** in Sanskrit, and we have so far described their mental aspects. We will describe their physical aspects as we perceive them in the material world in the next lecture.

The gunas are not mixed in a certain proportion permanently — it is changing all the time. That is why the mind is in a flux. I may wake up one morning very heavy and tired because tamas, the obscure one predominates or I may wake up full of clarity, very alert because sattva predominates. If I wake up in a rush and hurry to dress and go out it is because rajas predominates. If the three gunas were always in the same proportion they would not be a source of pain but because they fluctuate they are. This is because if we were always in one state we would have no means of comparison. If I was always dull, I would have no means to compare it with clarity, so I would accept it. If I was always in a state of agitation, I wouldn't mind, I would accept it because it would be my way. Since I have known quietness and confusion I will compare them and out of this comparison comes pain. Some people are very unhappy when they feel confused or dull and they really want to wake up so they make tea or coffee and perhaps do some kind of very stimulating activity because they want to get back to that alert state. Someone who knows tranquility doesn't want confusion but they cannot remain in that state permanently because it is the nature of the mind to constantly change — so there is pain. The pain is there because of the memory of previous states.

These are the reasons why in the philosophy of yoga it is said that pain, suffering, dissatisfaction cannot be escaped as long as the mind acts as it does now. This pain is all pervasive and the more one goes into the practice of yoga, the more one realises this. The dissatisfaction therefore grows until at a certain point one has the incentive to change. This is a necessary process which one has to go through.

This more or less explains the first aspects of this science of therapeutics which is yoga.