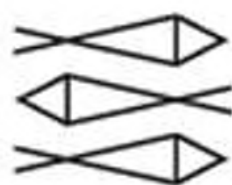


THE YOGA
SŪTRAS OF PATAÑJALI

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jīvanmukta: someone who is still embodied and thus functioning with a *citta*, but a *citta* that generates *vṛttis* that are not subject to ignorance, ego, attachment, etc. Recent scholarship (Whicher, 1998, Chapple 2008) has consistently and persuasively argued that it is a misconception to consider Yoga to be a radical withdrawal from the world; rather, it entails enlightened engagement with the world, that is, action stemming from *akliṣṭa-vṛttis*. There are certainly solid grounds to support this position.

अविद्या क्षेत्रम् उत्तरेषां प्रसुप्ततनुविच्छिन्नोदाराणाम् ॥ ४ ॥

II.4 *avidyā kṣetram uttareṣām prasupta-tanu- vicchinnoḍārāṇām*

avidyā, ignorance; *kṣetram*, field; *uttareṣām*, of the others; *prasupta*, dormant; *tanu*, weak; *vicchinna*, interrupted, intermittent; *udārāṇām*, activated, manifest

Ignorance is the breeding ground of the other *kleśas*, whether they are in a dormant, weak, intermittent, or fully activated state.

Patañjali gives the important information here, in resonance with all Indic soteriological thought, that ignorance, *avidyā*, is the foundation of all the other *kleśas*, the field, *kṣetra*, within which they grow, and hence the ultimate cause of *samsāra*. Like a piece of land is the substratum for bushes, creepers, grass, plants, etc., says Śaṅkara, so ignorance supports the other *kleśas*; when ignorance is dispelled, the other *kleśas* disappear.

Adopting what one might nowadays consider a psychoanalytical tone, Patañjali also differentiates among four different states in which the five *kleśas* manifest. Vyāsa defines these as the dormant state, *prasupta*, when the *kleśas* reside in the mind in potential form as seeds. Śaṅkara qualifies this by noting that only the *kleśas* other than ignorance can be found in a dormant state. Ignorance is never dormant, since it is the cause and support of the others and thus is always manifest. Otherwise, according to Vijñānabhikṣu, a *kleśa* may be dormant for a long

time, even two or three births, before reactivating. These dormant seeds eventually germinate when a person encounters particular situations or contexts that serve as triggers. They then develop into the fully activated, *udāra, kleśas* mentioned in this *sūtra*—*kleśas* that are actually exerting their influence on the mind at a given time.

When the *kleśas* are continually interrupted—appearing and then fading away—they are described as intermittent, *vicchinna*, the third state listed in this *sūtra*. For example, says Vyāsa, when the *kleśa* of attachment for something is present, aversion for it is absent. Aversion may succeed attachment, but the two do not occur simultaneously.⁷ In other words, clarifies Vijñānabhikṣu, aversion is not totally absent from a person when some other emotion like attachment is present; it is just in abeyance or latent (and, of course, vice versa). Therefore, it can be considered intermittent. Or, continues Vyāsa with a rare touch of humor, just because Caitra is attracted to one particular woman at one point in time does not mean he is disinterested in other women. He happens to be interested in one particular woman in the present, but he may become interested in some other woman in the future. These future attachment *kleśas* featuring other women remain either in dormant, weak, or interrupted states while the present *kleśa* is running its course. Intermittent *kleśas* differ from dormant *kleśas*, the first item on the list, insofar as they remain inactive for shorter periods of latency, according to Vijñānabhikṣu.

When, according to Vyāsa, one consciously cultivates a state of mind that is the opposite of the *kleśas*, they become weak, *tanu*, the second state noted by Patañjali. Indeed, Vācaspati Miśra and Vijñānabhikṣu note that one desiring liberation should actively counteract these *kleśas*. One can accomplish this by the practice of *kriyā-yoga*, which Patañjali has indicated weakens the *kleśas*, *tanū-karaṇa* (I.2). The practice of cultivating their opposites and pondering their consequences, which we will encounter in II.34, also weakens the *kleśas*: Thus, right knowledge dispels its opposite, the *kleśa* of ignorance; discrimination of the difference between *puruṣa*, the real self, and *prakṛti* dispels its opposite, the *kleśa* of ego, the false self; detachment dispels its opposites of

both the *kleśas* of attachment and aversion, since they are two sides of the same coin; and the realization of the eternity of the soul dispels the *kleśa* of clinging to life. More than being weakened, Vyāsa continues, ultimately these *kleśas* can be burnt by *yogīs* who have cultivated deep meditation, and they then completely lose their power to activate even when the *yogī* encounters situations that would under normal circumstances trigger their activation. Such *yogīs* are said to have had their last birth.

The *kleśas* therefore can actually be found in five states, according to Vyāsa. Since they continue to exist when they have been burnt, but have lost their power to produce effects, the burnt or impotent state can be added to the list of four mentioned in the *sūtra*, making a total of five. Śaṅkara says this burnt state was not included by Patañjali in this *sūtra* because burnt seeds are not common to all living beings as is the case with the other four states, and this *sūtra* concerns itself with the *kleśas* as generally found present among embodied beings. Only in the *yogī* is a burnt category to be found.

अनित्याशुचिदुःखानात्मसु नित्यशुचिसुखात्मख्यातिरविद्या ॥५॥

II.5 *anityāśuci-duḥkhānātmāsu nitya-śuci-sukhātma-khyātir avidyā*

anitya, noneternal, temporal; *aśuci*, impure; *duḥkha*, painful; *anātmāsu*, the nonself, that which is not *ātman*; *nitya*, eternal; *śuci*, pure; *sukha*, joyful; *ātma*, self; *khyātiḥ*, notion, perception; *avidyā*, ignorance

Ignorance is the notion that takes the self, which is joyful, pure, and eternal, to be the nonself, which is painful, unclean, and temporary.

Patañjali here gives a very important definition of ignorance, the primary cause of all bondage: *Avidyā*, ignorance, entails confounding the nature of the soul with that of the body. The body is here described as painful, *duḥkha*; unclean, *aśuci*; and

temporary, *anitya*, unlike the *puruṣa* who is joyful, *sukha*; pure, *śuci*; and eternal, *nitya*. We notice from the prefixes to these two sets of phrases that these two entities are exact opposites.⁸ Thus, by adding the negating prefix *a-* or *duḥ-* to the adjectives in the first part of this *sūtra* to the same adjectives in the second part, Patañjali is efficiently underscoring the fact that conventional awareness is the exact opposite of true knowledge. To confuse the two, or misidentify the latter with the former, is *avidyā*.

While anyone can understand that the body is temporary,⁹ what does Patañjali intend by saying it is “unclean”? Vyāsa quotes a verse: “The learned consider this body to be unclean, on account of its location, origin, sustenance, excretions, death, and the continual need to keep it clean.” As always, the commentators elaborate on why the body might be considered unclean due to these things. The location of the body can be seen as unclean because in its embryonic form it is situated near the mother’s excrement and urine; its origin is sperm and blood; its sustenance is fluids produced from food and drink; and its excretions are the discharges from the various outlets of the body—urine, feces, sweat, and mucus.

There are various views of the body in Hindu knowledge systems. *Āyurveda* depicts the body as a complex combination of substances, *dhātus*, that need to be kept in appropriate balance; the *kāma-śāstras*, desire texts, see the body as a means through which one can experience intense sensual enjoyment in skillfully manipulated circumstances; *tantra* considers the body to be a manifestation of *citi-śakti*, divine energy; *bhakti* construes the body as a temple that can be used in the service of God. These views are not mutually exclusive, but the ascetic tradition tends to view the body as a rather unpleasant bag of obnoxious substances.

In reality, as the cliché goes, beauty is skin deep, and a beautiful body is just a bag of bodily fluids and organs, which can be unpleasant and repulsive when taken out of their natural biological context. Thus, part of Patañjali’s definition of ignorance in this *sūtra* is that in the unclean or impure there is an illusion of purity or beauty, which, as Vyāsa puts it, means considering this “very distasteful” body to be pure, like the man

enamored of a “woman, beautiful like the rising new moon, with limbs made of honey and nectar and eyes as large as the blue lotus, who enthuses the world of men with flirtatious glances.”¹⁰ But despite such surface-level attractions, all in all, any body is in reality a sack of potentially rather embarrassing substances. Its real nature is evidenced by the need to constantly clean it (and Patañjali will later refer to the practice of cleanliness, essentially an act of removing the discharges and excretions of the body, as a catalyst that, if performed with the goals of *yoga* in mind, can lead to dispelling any erotic fantasies about the reality of the body). Realization of the nature of the body becomes most vivid during old age and at death: Nobody wants to linger around a decomposing body.

In this same vein, the Buddha advised his followers to actually contemplate the reality of the impurities of the body, that is, the bodily substances which, taken out of context, would be considered obnoxious, specifically that the body is simply a collection of “hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, stomach, bowels, intestines, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovial fluid, urine.”¹¹ Indeed, he actually prescribes a series of visual meditations on these realities:

And moreover bhikkus [monks], a brother, just as if he had seen a body abandoned in the charnel field, dead for one, two, or three days, swollen, turning black and blue, and decomposed, applies that perception to this very body (of his own), reflecting: “this body, too, is even so constituted, is of even such a nature, has not gone beyond that (fate).” ... And moreover bhikkus [monks], a brother, just as if he had seen a body abandoned in the charnel field [reduced to] a chain of bones hanging together by tendons, with flesh and blood yet about it, or stripped of flesh but yet spotted with blood; or cleaned of both flesh and blood; or reduced to bare bones, loosed from tendons, scattered here and there, so that the bones of a hand lie in one direction, in another the bones of a foot, in another, those of a leg, in another a thigh bone, in

another the pelvis, in another the pineal vertebrae, in another the skull, applies that perception to this very body (of his own) thinking: “this body, too, is even so constituted, is of such a nature, has not gone beyond that (fate).”¹²

In short, the Yoga tradition does not consider the body a suitable place to seek happiness for those interested in enlightenment. Patañjali will make the same point in II.15 by pointing to the notion of finding pleasure in what is really pain, says Vyāsa. Patañjali and the commentators have a good deal more to say about the nature of the body below.

The nonself, *an-ātman*, referred to by Patañjali here, says Vyāsa, actually consists not only of the body, which is the locus for enjoyment, and the mind, which is an instrument through which the awareness of *puruṣa* can contact the world, but also the accessories or paraphernalia of the body, whether animate (such as spouse, animals, and offspring) or inanimate (such as furniture or food). Although one may think that one’s body, one’s mind, and even one’s possessions are one’s real self, they are not, and to confound them as such is ignorance. Vyāsa quotes a verse that the commentators ascribe to Pañcaśikha, an ancient authority in the Sāṅkhya tradition: “One who regards objects, whether animate or inanimate, as part of one’s self, rejoicing when these things prosper, and lamenting upon their demise, is deluded.”¹³ As the *Gītā* puts it: “The wise (*paṇḍitāḥ*) lament neither for the living nor the dead” (II.11).

I must acknowledge a Vedāntic slant in my translation of this *sūtra*, where joy, purity, and eternality are imputed to the soul. Most translators, traditional and modern, translate the *sūtra* perfectly appropriately along the following lines: Ignorance is the apprehension of the joyful, the pure, the eternal, and the self in that which is painful, unclean, temporary, and the nonself. Unlike the Vedānta tradition, the Sāṅkhya Yoga tradition (along with the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika traditions), at least in their classical expressions, generally do not speak of the experience of the liberated *puruṣa* as blissful but rather as an absence of suffering.¹⁴ Even Vijñānabhikṣu, who otherwise does not hesitate to blend Vedāntic notions into his commentary, states in his *Yoga-sāra-*

saṅgraha that “we do not subscribe to the Neo-Vedāntics who imagine that ultimate liberation consists of the attainment of supreme bliss.”¹⁵ However, an argument can be made that, in contrast to the qualities of the nonself, Patañjali is alluding to the Upaniṣadic view that the real self—and he uses the Upaniṣadic term *ātman* for the soul here—is *sukha*, blissful. Both scholars and some traditional commentators have disregarded the possibility that Patañjali might be explicitly introducing an Upaniṣadic concept, the blissfulness of the self, underscored by his specific usage of the Upaniṣadic term *ātman*. In Vedānta, the highest self consists of bliss, *ānandamayo bhyāsāt* (*Vedānta Sūtras* I.1.13), but there is an assumption in some expressions of the Yoga tradition that the nature of the self is pure consciousness without any content whatsoever, including bliss. Vyāsa himself speaks of the bliss of liberation, compared to which even the highest bliss of worldly pleasure including the states of *sattva* are considered suffering. (Vyāsa in general is quite comfortable correlating *puruṣa* with the *Brahman* of the Upaniṣads [for example, III.34], as has always been standard for any orthodox Hindu thinker.) Whatever direction the later tradition took in this matter, this *sūtra* can be read as indicating that Patañjali, too, subscribed to this view.

Overall, Patañjali has very little to say about the nature of the actual experience of *puruṣa* attained in *nirbīja*- or *asamprajñāta-samādhi*, since, naturally, this state is beyond words and conceptualization, and thus beyond description. But this *sūtra* can be read as suggesting that it is a state of *sukha*, happiness, compared to all experiences other than that of the self, which are ultimately various shades of *duḥkha*, suffering, frustration. (Clearly, the prospect of a positive experience of ultimate bliss in the liberated state is far more enticing for one considering the arduous path of *yoga* than merely the prospect of the cessation of pain!)

The term *sukha* or *ānanda* is used in the Vedānta tradition as an inherent characteristic of the ultimate self¹⁶—the *Gītā* uses the term a number of times to describe the experience of the self (V.21; VI.21, 27–28; XIV.27), making it clear, however, that this type of *sukha*, unlike the ephemeral and fleeting *sukha* of sensual

indulgence, is *akṣayam*, imperishable (V.21); *ātyantikam*, infinite (VI.21, 28); *uttamam*, the highest (VI.27); and *ekāntika*, absolute (XIV.27). The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* goes a step further and, in a rhetorical or figurative mode, attempts to quantify the unquantifiable experience of bliss inherent in the self according to the Upaniṣadic tradition:

Let us take a young man—a first class young man who is the most learned, cultured and strong person. And let us suppose that he owns this whole world with all its resources. This situation would constitute one measure of human bliss. A single measure of the bliss of earthly *gandharva* celestials ... equals one hundred measures of human bliss; a single measure of the bliss of celestial *gandharvas* ... equals one hundred measures of the bliss of earthly *gandharvas*; a single measure of bliss of the forefathers, who live long in their realm ... equals one hundred measures of the bliss of celestial *gandharvas*; a single measure of the bliss enjoyed by the gods who attained their status by birth ... equals one hundred measures of bliss of the forefathers; a single measure of bliss of the gods who attained their status by good deeds ... equals one hundred measures of the bliss of those gods who attained their status by birth; a single measure of the bliss of Indra, king of the gods ... equals one hundred measures of the bliss of the [other] gods; a single measure of the bliss of the sage of the gods, Bṛhaspati, ... equals one hundred measures of the bliss of Indra; a single measure of the bliss of Prajāpati, the progenitor of species, ... equals one hundred measures of the bliss of Bṛhaspati; a single measure of the bliss of *Brahman* equals one hundred measures of the bliss of Prajāpati. (II.8)

In other words, the bliss of *Brahman* is countless times greater than whatever might constitute the highest level of human bliss. With such figurative language, these texts try to point to the experience of *Brahman/ātman/puruṣa* as not only a state of bliss, but one that is far more blissful than any pleasurable experience connected with *prakṛti*, the world of matter.

A further somewhat technical point is that in Sanskrit, the word for ignorance is *avidyā*. As in English words like “a-theist” or “a-temporal,” an *a*-prefixed to a noun in Sanskrit indicates an absence of the thing in question, so *avidyā* literally means a lack of *vidyā*, knowledge. However, ignorance, says Vyāsa, is not just the absence of right knowledge but is an actual type of perception in its own right, a perception of reality that is the opposite of true knowledge. Just as *amitra*, enemy (literally, *a* + *mitra*, not + friend), does not merely mean the absence of a friend but an actual real inimical person in his or her own right, so *avidyā* is a real mental state, not just an absence of knowledge. Thus the *kleśas* are actual in the *citta*. There are differences among the Hindu philosophical schools as to what constitutes ignorance, and Vijñānabhikṣu points out in this regard that Yoga philosophy differs from its sister school of Sāṅkhya, which takes ignorance to be lack of discrimination rather than an actual state of mind in its own right.

Also, although Vyāsa seems to equate *avidyā* with the *vṛtti* of *viparyaya*, error, in I.8, *avidyā* appears to be a more fundamental element in the subconscious. It underpins all the *vṛttis*, including *pramāṇa*, right knowledge, by which the *viparyaya-vṛtti* is dispelled. Error simply means to perceive reality incorrectly on occasion and thus may come and go. Ignorance here, *avidyā*, means much more fundamentally to confuse *puruṣa* with *prakṛti* and remains permanent until enlightenment is attained (even though the other *kleśas*, as noted above, can be intermittent, etc.). In other words, even if surface-level error, *viparyaya*, has been dispelled by surface-level *pramāṇa*, right knowledge, both these *vṛttis* are still underpinned by a deep-structure level of ultimate ignorance. *Viparyaya* is a conscious state but not necessarily a permanent or fundamental one; *avidyā*, in contrast, operates constantly at the very deepest level of the subconscious (until it is dispelled by true knowledge prior to liberation).

The topic of ignorance is discussed extensively by all philosophical schools—since it is, after all, the cause of bondage for almost all soteriological traditions of Indic thought—and the commentators introduce Vedāntic analogies here. Vijñānabhikṣu gives the familiar example of silver and mother-of-pearl to

illustrate ignorance: Taking the body and the things of the manifest world to be real and eternal is like mistaking mother-of-pearl to be silver. Hariharānanda gives the other classic Vedāntic example of the snake and the rope: A person walking along at dusk happens upon a rope lying on the path but mistakes it for a snake and is alarmed. Similarly, ignorance is taking one thing for another (in this case, perceiving the nonself as the real self), a false cognition but a cognition nonetheless. Therefore, although ignorance can be dispelled by *vidyā*, its opposite or (to use the more specific Yogic term) *viveka*, discrimination, ignorance in Yoga philosophy is an actual state of mind (rather than just an absence of *vidyā* or discrimination as some other schools hold).

One might note, given the Yoga school's engagement with aspects of Buddhist teachings, that Patañjali defines ignorance in exactly the same terms as used by the Buddha, with one essential and dramatic reversal. Instead of ignorance being defined as the notion that takes the *self*, which is joyful, pure, and eternal, to be the *nonself*, which is painful, impure, and temporary, as Patañjali has done here, Buddhist teachings consider ignorance to be the notion that takes the *an-ātman*, the *absence* of self, which is a joyful, pure, and eternal state, to be an autonomous independent *ātman*, a notion that results in a painful, impure, and temporary state (*Paṭisambhidā Sutta* I.8.2.3). This essential difference will be addressed at various places below, but we can note here that in Buddhism there is no autonomous *ātman* (*puruṣa*) self that can be separated from its interdependence with *prakṛti*. Not only is there no *puruṣa*, but clinging to notions of such an entity is a primary cause of ignorance rather than enlightenment. The two views are thus diametrically opposed—the very goal of *yoga* and of human existence in the Yoga school is the very cause of bondage and ignorance in Buddhism.

दृग्दर्शनशक्त्योरेकात्मतेवास्मिता ॥ ६ ॥

II.6 *ḍṛg-darśana-śaktyor ekātmatevāsmitā*

ḍṛk, the subjective power of seeing, the seer; *darśana*, instrumental power of seeing, sight; *śaktyoḥ*, of the