

# The Six Systems of Hindu Philosophy

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## **Theoria and Praxis**

Throughout its long and largely unrecorded history, Indian thought preserved its central concern with ontology and epistemology, with noetic psychology as the indispensable bridge between metaphysics and ethics, employing introspection and self-testing as well as logical tools, continually confronting the instruments of cognition with the fruits of contemplation. Through its immemorial oral teachings and a vast variety of written texts, the fusion of *theoria* and *praxis*, theory and practice, was never sacrificed to the demands of academic specialization or the compartmentalization of human endeavor. Diverse schools of thought shared the conviction that true understanding must flow from the repeated application of received truths. Coming to know is a dynamic, dialectical process in which thought stimulates contemplation and regulates conduct, and in turn is refined by them. Although an individual who would be healthy and whole thinks, feels and acts, gnosis necessarily involves the fusion of thought, will and feeling, resulting in *metanoia*, a radically altered state of being. The Pythagorean conception of a philosopher as a lover of wisdom is close to the standpoint of an earnest seeker of truth in the Indian tradition.

Indian thought did not suffer the traumatic cognitive disruption caused by the emergence of ecclesiastical Christianity in the Mediterranean world, where an excessive concern with specification of rigid belief, sanctioned and safeguarded by an institutional conception of religious authority and censorship, sundered thought and action to such an extent that it became common to think one way and act in another with seeming impunity. The chasms which opened up between thought, will and feeling provided fertile soil for every kind of psychopathology, in part because such a fragmentation of the human being engenders inversions, obsessions and even perversities, and also in part because for a thousand years it has been virtually impossible to hold up a credible paradigm of the whole and healthy human being. The philosophical quest became obscured in the modern West by the linear succession of schools, each resulting from a violent reaction to its predecessors, each claiming to possess the Truth more or less exclusively, and often insisting upon the sole validity of its method of proceeding. The slavish concern with academic respectability and the fear of anathemization resulted in the increasing alienation of thought from being, of

cognition from conduct, and philosophical disputation from the problems of daily life.

Indian thought did not spurn the accumulated wisdom of its ancients in favour of current fashions and did not experience a violent disruption of its traditional hospitality to multiple standpoints. The so-called *astika* or orthodox schools found no difficulty in combining their veneration of the Vedic hymns with a wide and diverse range of views, and even the *nastika* or heterodox schools, which repudiated the canonical “authority” of the Vedas, retained much of Vedic and Upanishadic metaphysics and almost the whole of their psychology and ethics. Indian philosophical schools could not see themselves as exclusive bearers of the total Truth. They emerged together from a long-standing and continuous effort to enhance our common understanding of God, Man and Nature, and they came to be considered as *darshanas* or paradigmatic standpoints shedding light from different angles on noumenal and phenomenal realities. They refrained from claiming that any illumination which can be rendered in words—or even in thoughts—can be either final or complete.

### **The Six Schools**

“It may be pointed out here that a system of philosophy however lofty and true it may be should not be expected to give us an absolutely correct picture of the transcendent truths as they really exist. Because philosophy works through the medium of the intellect and the intellect has its inherent limitations, it cannot understand or formulate truths which are beyond its scope.... We have to accept these limitations when we use the intellect as an instrument for understanding and discovering these truths in the initial stages. It is no use throwing away this instrument, poor and imperfect though it is, because it gives us at least some help in organizing our effort to know the truth in the only way it can be known—by Self-realization.” (I. K. Taimni)

The ageless and dateless Vedas, especially the exalted hymns of the Rig Veda, have long been esteemed as the direct expression of what gods and divine seers, rishis or immortal sages, saw when they peered into the imperishable center of Being which is also the origin of the entire cosmos. The Upanishads (from *upa*, *ni* and *sad*, meaning “to sit down near” a sage or guru), included in the Vedas, constitute the highest transmission of the fruits of illumination attained by these rishis. Often cast in the form of memorable dialogues between spiritual teachers and disciples, they represent rich glimpses of truth, not pieced together from disparate intellectual insights, but as they are at once revealed to the divine eye, *divya chakshu*, which looks into the core of Reality, freely intimated in idioms, metaphors and mantras suited to the awakening consciousness and spiritual potentials of diverse disciples. However divergent their modes of

expression, they are all addressed to those who are ready to learn, willing to meditate deeply, and seek greater self-knowledge through intensive self-questioning. The Upanishads do not purport to provide discursive knowledge, conceptual clarification or speculative dogmas, but rather focus on the fundamental themes which concern the soul as a calm spectator of the temporal succession of states of mind from birth to death, seeking for what is essential amidst the ephemeral, the enduring within the transient, the abiding universals behind the flux of fleeting appearances.

From this standpoint, they are truly therapeutic in that they heal the sickness of the soul caused by passivity, ignorance and delusion. This ignorance is not that of the malformed or malfunctioning personality, maimed by childhood traumas or habitual vices. It is the more fundamental ignorance (*avidya*) of the adroit and well-adapted person who has learnt to cope with the demands of living and fulfil his duties in the world at a certain level without however, coming to terms with the causes of his longings and limitations, his dreams and discontinuities, his entrenched expectations and his hidden potentials. The sages spoke to those who had a measure of integrity and honesty and were willing to examine their presuppositions, but lacked the fuller vision and deeper wisdom that require a sustained search and systematic meditation. For such an undertaking, mental clarity, moral sensitivity, relaxed self-control and spiritual courage are needed, as well as a willingness to withdraw for a period from worldly concerns. The therapeutics of self-transcendence is rooted in a recondite psychology which accommodates the vast spectrum of self-consciousness, different levels of cognition and degrees of development, reaching up to the highest conceivable self-enlightenment.

Upanishadic thought presupposed the concrete and not merely conceptual continuity of God, Nature and Man. Furthermore, Man is the self-conscious microcosm of the macrocosm, where the part is not only inseparably one with the whole but also reflects and resonates with it. Man could neither be contemplated properly nor fully comprehended in any context less than the entirety of visible and invisible Nature, and so too, ethics, logic and psychology could not be sundered from metaphysics. "Is," the way things are, is vitally linked to "must," the ways things must be, as well as to "ought," the way human beings should think and act, through "can," the active exploration of human potentialities and possibilities, which are not different, save in scope and degree, from cosmic potencies. A truly noetic psychology bridges metaphysics and ethics through a conscious mirroring of *rita*, ordered cosmic harmony, in *dharma*, righteous human conduct that freely acknowledges what is due to each and every aspect of Nature, including all humanity, past, present and future.

The ancient sages resolved the One-many problem at the mystical, psychological, ethical and social levels by affirming the radical metaphysical and spiritual unity of all life, whilst fully recognizing (and refusing to diminish through any form of reductionism) the immense diversity of human types and the progressive awakenings of human consciousness at different stages of material evolution and spiritual involution. The immemorial pilgrimage of humanity can be both universally celebrated and act as a constant stimulus to individual growth. Truth, like the sun shining over the summits of a Himalayan range, is one, and the pathways to it are as many and varied as there are people to tread them.

As if emulating the sculptor's six perspectives to render accurately any specific form in space, ancient Indian thinkers stressed six darshanas, which are sometimes called the six schools of philosophy. These are astika or orthodox in that they all find inspiration in different ways in the Vedas. And like the sculptor's triple set of perspectives—front-back, left side-right side, top-bottom—the six darshanas have been seen as three complementarities, polarized directions that together mark the trajectory of laser light through the unfathomable reaches of ineffable wisdom. Each standpoint has its integrity and coherence in that it demands nothing less than the deliberate and radical reconstitution of consciousness from its unregenerate and unthinking modes of passive acceptance of the world. Yet none can claim absoluteness, finality or infallibility, for such asseverations would imply that limited conceptions and discursive thought can capture ultimate Reality. Rather, each darshana points with unerring accuracy towards that cognition which can be gained only by complete assimilation, practical self-transformation and absorption into it. At the least, every darshana corresponds with a familiar state of mind of the seeker, a legitimate and verifiable mode of cognition which makes sense of the world and the self at some level.

All genuine seekers are free to adopt any one or more of the darshanas at any time and even to defend their chosen standpoint against the others but they must concede the possibility of synthesizing and transcending the six standpoints in a seventh mode which culminates in taraka, transcendental, self-luminous gnosis, the goal of complete enlightenment often associated with the secret, incommunicable way of *buddhiyoga* intimated in the fourth, seventh and eighteenth chapters of the Bhagavad Gita.

Although scholars have speculated on the sequential emergence of the darshanas, and though patterns of interplay can be discerned in their full flowering, their roots lie in the ancient texts and they arise together as distinctive standpoints. It has also been held that the six schools grew out of sixty-two systems of thought lost in the mists of antiquity. At any rate, it is generally agreed that each of the later six schools was inspired by a sage

and teacher who struck the keynote which has reverberated throughout its growths refinement and elaboration. As the six schools are complementary to each other, they are traditionally viewed as the six branches of a single tree. All six provide a theoretical explanation of ultimate Reality and a practical means of emancipation. The oldest are Yoga and Sankhya, the next being Vaishesika and Nyaya, and the last pair are Purva Mimansa and Vedanta (sometimes called Uttara Mimansa). The founders of these schools are considered to be Patanjali of Yoga, Kapila of Sankhya, Kanada of Vaishesika, Gautama of Nyaya, Jaimini of Purva Mimansa and Vyasa of Vedanta, though the last is also assigned to Badarayana. All of them propounded the tenets of their philosophical systems or schools in the form of short sutras, whose elucidation required and stimulated elaborate commentaries. Since about 200 C.E., a vast crop of secondary works has emerged which has generated some significant discussions as well as a welter of scholastic disputation and didactic controversies, moving far away from praxis into the forests of theoria, or reducing praxis to rigid codes and theoria to sterile formulas. At the same time, there has remained a remarkable vitality to most of these schools, owing to their transmission by long lineages which have included many extraordinary teachers and exemplars. This cannot be recovered merely through the study of texts, however systematic and rigorous, in a philosophical tradition which is essentially oral, even though exceptional powers of accurate recall have been displayed in regard to the texts.

### **Nyaya and Vaishesika**

Nyaya and Vaishesika are schools primarily concerned with analytic approaches to the objects of knowledge, using carefully tested principles of logic. The word *nyaya* suggests that by which the mind reaches a conclusion, and since the word also means “right” or “just,” Nyaya is the science of correct thinking. The founder of this school, Gautama, lived about 150 B.C.E., and its source-book is the *Nyaya Sutra*. Whilst knowledge requires an object, a knowing subject and a state of knowing, the validity of cognition depends upon *pramana*, the means of cognition. There are four acceptable *pramanas*, of which *pratyaksha*—direct perception or intuition—is most important. Perception requires the mind, *manas*, to mediate between the self and the senses, and perception may be determinate or indeterminate. Determinate perception reveals the class to which an object of knowledge belongs, its specific qualities and the union of the two. Indeterminate perception is simple apprehension without regard to genus or qualities. In the Nyaya school, indeterminate perception is not knowledge but rather its prerequisite and starting-point.

*Anumana* or inference is the second *pramana* or means of cognition. It involves a

fivefold syllogism which includes a universal statement, an illustrative example and an application to the instance at hand. *Upamana* is the apt use of analogy, in which the similarities which make the analogy come alive are essential and not superficial. *Shabda*, sound or verbal expression, is the credible testimony of authority, which requires not uncritical acceptance but the thoughtful consideration of words, meanings and the modes of reference. As the analytic structure of Nyaya logic suggests, its basic approach to reality is atomistic, and so the test of claims of truth is often effectiveness in application, especially in the realm of action. Typically, logical discussion of a proposition takes the form of a syllogism with five parts: the proposition (*pratijna*) the cause (*hetu*), the exemplification (*drishtanta*), the recapitulation (*upanaya*) and the conclusion (*nigamana*).

However divergent their views on metaphysics and ethics, all schools accept and use Nyaya canons of sound reasoning. A thorough training in logic is required not only in all philosophical reasoning, exposition and disputation, but it is also needed by those who seek to stress mastery of praxis over a lifetime and thereby become spiritual exemplars. This at once conveys the enormous strength of an immemorial tradition as well as the pitiable deficiencies of most professors and pundits, let alone the self-styled so-called exoteric gurus of the contemporary East. Neither thaumaturgic wonders nor mass hypnosis can compensate for mental muddles and shallow thinking; indeed, they become insuperable obstacles to even a good measure of gnosis and noetic theurgy, let alone authentic enlightenment and self-mastery.

The Vaishesika school complements Nyaya in its distinct pluralism. Its founder, Kanada, also known as Kanabhaksha, lived around 200 C.E., and its chief work is the *Vaishesika Sutra*. Its emphasis on particulars is reflected in its name, since *vishesha* means "particularity," and it is concerned with properly delineating the categories of objects of experience. These objects of experience, *padarthas*, are six: substance (*dravya*), quality (*guna*), and karma or movement and activity (forming the triplicity of objective existence), and generality (*samanya*), particularity (*vishesha*) and *samavayi* or inherence (forming a triad of modes of intellectual discernment which require valid logical inference). A seventh object of experience, non-existence (*shunya*), was eventually added to the six as a strictly logical necessity. The Vaishesika point of view recognizes nine irreducible substances: earth, water, air, fire, aether (*akasha*), time, space, self and mind, all of which are distinct from the qualities which inhere in them. The self is necessarily a substance—a substrate of qualities—because consciousness cannot be a property of the physical body, the sense-organs or the brain-mind. Although the self as a substance must be everywhere pervasive, its everyday capacity for feeling,

willing and knowing is focussed in the bodily organism.

Since the self experiences the consequences of its own deeds, there is, according to Vaishesika, a plurality of souls, each of which has its *vishesha*, individuality or particularity. What we experience is made up of parts, and is non-eternal, but the ultimate components—atoms—are eternal. Individuality is formed by imperceptible souls and certain atoms, which engender the organ of thought. At certain times, during immense cosmogonic cycles, nothing is visible, as both souls and atoms are asleep, but when a new cycle of creation begins, these souls reunite with certain atoms. Gautama asserted that even during incarnated existence, emancipation may be attained through ascetic detachment and the highest stages of contemplative absorption or *samadhi*. Though the Vaishesika school wedded an atomistic standpoint to a strict atheism, over time thinkers accepted a rationalistic concept of Deity as a prime mover in the universe, a philosophical requisite acceptable to Nyaya. The two schools or systems were combined by Kusumanjali of Udayana about 900 C.E. in his proof of the existence of God. Since then, both schools have been theistic. The Jains claim early parentage for the Vaishesika system, and this merely illustrates what is very common in the Indian tradition, that innovators like Gautama and Kanada were reformulating an already ancient school rather than starting *de novo*.

### **Purva Mimansa**

The Purva Mimansa of Jaimini took as its point of departure neither knowledge nor the objects of experience, but *dharma*, duty, as enjoined in the Vedas and Upanishads. As the accredited sources of *dharma*, these sacred texts are not the promulgations of some deity who condescended to step into time and set down principles of correct conduct. Rather, the wisdom in such texts is eternal and uncreate, and true rishis have always been able to see them and to translate that clear vision into mantric sounds and memorable utterances. Hence Mimansa consecrates the mind to penetrating the words which constitute this sacred transmission. Central to the Mimansa school is the theory of self-evidence—*svata pramana*: truth is its own guarantee and the consecrated practice of faith provides its own validation. Repeated testings will yield correct results by exposing discrepancies and validating real cognitions. There is a recognizable consensus amidst the independent visions of great seers, and each individual must recognize or rediscover this consensus by proper use and concentrated enactment of mantras and hymns. Every sound in the fifty-two letters of Sanskrit has a cosmogonic significance and a theurgic effect. Inspired mantras are exact mathematical combinations of sounds which emanate potent vibrations that can transform the magnetic sphere around the individual as well as the magnetosphere of the earth. Self-testing without self-deception

can become a sacred activity, which is *sui generis*.

From the Mimamsa perspective, every act is necessarily connected to perceptible results. One might say that the effects are inherent in the act, just as the fruit of the tree is in the seed which grew and blossomed. There is no ontological difference between act and result, for the apparent gap between them is merely the consequence of the operation of time. Since the fruit of a deed may not follow immediately upon the act, or even manifest in the same lifetime, the necessary connection between act and result takes the form of *apurva*, an unseen force which is the unbreakable link between them. This testable postulate gives significance to the concept of dharma in all its meanings—"duty," "path," "teaching," "religion," "natural law," "righteousness," "accordance with cosmic harmony"—but it cannot by itself secure complete liberation from conditioned existence. Social duties are important, but spiritual duties are even more crucial, and the saying "To thine own self be true" has an array of meanings reaching up to the highest demands of soul-tendance. In the continual effort to work off past karma and generate good karma, there is unavoidable tension between different duties, social and spiritual. The best actions, paradigmatically illustrated in Vedic invocations and rituals, lead to exalted conditions, even to some heavenly condition or blissful state. Nonetheless, as the various darshanas interacted and exchanged insights, Mimamsa came to consider the highest action as resulting in a cessation of advances and retreats on the field of merit, whereby dharma and adharma were swallowed up in a sublime and transcendental state of unbroken awareness of the divine.

In striving to penetrate the deepest arcane meaning of the sacred texts, Mimamsa thinkers accepted the four *pramanas* or modes of knowledge set forth in Nyaya, and added two others: *arthapatti* or postulation, and *abhava* or negation and non-existence. They did this in part because, given their view of the unqualified eternity of the Vedas, they held that all cognition is valid at some level and to some degree. There can be no false knowledge; whatever is known is necessarily true. As a consequence, they saw no reason to prove the truth of any cognition. Rather, they sought to demonstrate its falsity, for if disproof were successful, it would show that there had been no cognition at all. The promise of gnosis rests upon the sovereign method of falsifiability rather than a vain attempt to seek total verification in a public sense. Shifting the onus of proof in this way can accommodate the uncreate Vedas, which are indubitably true and which constitute the gold standard against which all other claims to truth are measured. Mimamsa rests upon the presupposition of the supremacy of Divine Wisdom, the sovereignty of the Revealed Word and the possibility of its repeated realization. Even among those who cannot accept the liturgical or revelatory validity and adequacy

of the Vedas, the logic of disproof can find powerful and even rigorous application. As a method, it became important to the philosophers of Vedanta.

### **Vedanta (Uttara Mimansa)**

Vedanta, meaning “the end or goal of the Vedas,” sometimes also called Uttara Mimansa, addresses the spiritual and philosophical themes of the Upanishads, which are considered to complete and form the essence of the Vedas. Badarayana’s magisterial *Brahma Sutras* ordered the Upanishadic Teachings in a logically coherent sequence which considers the nature of the supreme brahman, the ultimate Reality, and the question of the embodiment of the unconditioned Self. Each of the five hundred and fifty-five sutras (literally, “threads”) are extremely short and aphoristic, requiring a copious commentary to be understood. In explaining their meaning, various commentators presented Vedantic doctrines in different ways. Shankaracharya, the chief of the commentators and perhaps the greatest philosopher in the Indian tradition, espoused the advaita, non-dual, form of Vedanta, the purest form of monism, which has never been excelled. He asked whether in human experience there is anything which is impervious to doubt. Noting that every object of cognition—whether dependent on the senses, the memory or pure conceptualization—can be doubted, he recognized in the doubter that which is beyond doubt of any kind. Even if one reduces all claims to mere avowals—bare assertions about what one seems to experience—there nonetheless remains that which avows. It is proof of itself, because nothing can disprove it. In this, it is also different from everything else, and this difference is indicated by the distinction between subject and object. The experiencing Self is subject; what it experiences is an object. Unlike objects, nothing can affect it: it is immutable and immortal.

For Shankara, this Self (atman) is sat-chit-ananda, being or existence, consciousness or cognition, and unqualified bliss. If there were no world, there would be no objects of experience, and so although the world as it is experienced is not ultimately real, it is neither abhava, non-existent, nor shunya, void. Ignorance is the result of confusing atman, the unconditioned subject, with anatman, the external world. From the standpoint of the cosmos, the world is subject to space, time and causality, but since these categories arise from nascent experience, they are inherently inadequate save to point beyond themselves to the absolute, immutable, self-identical brahman, which is absolute Being (sat). Atman is brahman, for the immutable singularity of the absolute subject, the Self, is not merely isomorphic, but radically identical with the transcendent singularity of the ultimate Reality. Individuals who have yet to realize this fundamental truth, which is in fact the whole Truth, impose out of ignorance various attitudes and conceptions on the world, like the man who mistakes an old piece of rope discarded on

the trail for a poisonous serpent. He reacts to the serpent, but his responses are inappropriate and cause him to suffer unnecessarily, because there is no serpent on the trail to threaten him. Nonetheless, the rope is there. For Shankara, the noumenal world is real, and when a person realizes its true nature, gaining wisdom thereby, his responses will be appropriate and cease to cause suffering. He will realize that he is the atman and that the atman is brahman.

Although brahman is ultimately nirguna, without qualities, the aspirant to supreme knowledge begins by recognizing that the highest expression of brahman to the finite mind is Ishvara, which is saguna brahman, Supreme Reality conceived through the modes of pure logic. Taking Ishvara, which points beyond itself to That (Tat), as his goal and paradigm, the individual assimilates himself to Ishvara through the triple path of ethics, knowledge and devotion—the karma, jnana and bhakti yogas of the Bhagavad Gita—until moksha, emancipation and self-realization, is attained. For Shankara, moksha is not the disappearance of the world but the dissolution of avidya, ignorance.

Ramanuja, who lived much later than Shankara, adopted a qualified non-dualism, Vishishtadvaita Vedanta, by holding that the supreme brahman manifests as selves and matter. For him, both are dependent on brahman, and so selves, not being identical with the Ultimate, always retain their separate identity. As a consequence, they are dependent on brahman, and that dependency expresses itself self-consciously as bhakti or devotion. In this context, however, the dependence which is manifest as bhakti is absurd unless brahman is thought to be personal in some degree, and so brahman cannot be undifferentiated. Emancipation or freedom is not union with the divine, but rather the irreversible and unwavering intuition of Deity. The Self is not identical with brahman, but its true nature is this intuition, which is freedom. Faith that brahman exists is sufficient and individual souls are parts of brahman, who is the creator of universes. Yet brahman does not create anything new; what so appears is merely a modification of the subtle and the invisible to the gross which we can see and sense. Because we can commune with this God by prayer, devotion and faith, there is the possibility of human redemption from ignorance and delusion. The individual is not effaced when he is redeemed; he maintains his self-identity and enjoys the fruits of his faith.

About a century and a half after Ramanuja, Madhava promulgated a dualistic (dvaita) Vedanta, in which he taught that brahman, selves and the world are separate and eternal, even though the latter two depend forever upon the first. From this standpoint, brahman directs the world, since all else is dependent, and is therefore both transcendent and immanent. As that which can free the self, brahman is identified with

Vishnu. Whereas the ultimate Reality or brahman is neither independent (svatantra) nor dependent (paratantra), God or Vishnu is independent, whereas souls and matter are dependent. God did not cause the cosmos but is part of it, and by his presence keeps it in motion. Individual souls are dependent on brahman but are also active agents with responsibilities which require the recognition of the omnipresence and omnipotence of God. For the individual self, there exists either the bondage which results from ignorance and the karma produced through acting ignorantly, or release effected through the adoration, worship and service of Deity. The self is free when its devotion is pure and perpetual. Although the later forms of Vedanta lower the sights of human potentiality from the lofty goal of universal self-consciousness and conscious immortality taught by Shankaracharya, they all recognize the essential difference between bondage and freedom. The one is productive of suffering and the other offers emancipation from it. But whereas for Shankara the means of emancipation is wisdom (jnana) as the basis of devotion (bhakti) and nishkama karma or disinterested action, the separation between atman and brahman is crucial for Ramanuja and necessitates total bhakti, whilst for Madhava there are five distinctions within his dualism—between God and soul, God and matter, soul and matter, one form of matter and another, and especially between one soul and another—thus requiring from all souls total obeisance to the omnipresent and omnipotent God.

Suffering is the starting point of the Sankhya darshana which provides the general conceptual framework of Yoga philosophy. Patanjali set out the Taraka Raja Yoga system, linking transcendental and self-luminous wisdom (taraka) with the alchemy of mental transformation, and like the exponents of other schools, he borrowed those concepts and insights which could best delineate his perspective. Since he found Sankhya metaphysics useful to understanding, like a sturdy boat used to cross a stream and then left behind when the opposite bank has been reached, many thinkers have traditionally presented Sankhya as the theory for which Yoga is the practice. This approach can aid understanding, providing one recognizes from the first and at all times that yoga is the path to metaconsciousness, for which no system of concepts and discursive reasoning, however erudite, rigorous and philosophical, is adequate. More than any other school or system, Yoga is essentially experiential, in the broadest, fullest and deepest meaning of that term.

## **Sankhya**

The term “Sankhya” is ultimately derived from the Sanskrit root khya, meaning “to know,” and the prefix san, “exact.” Exact knowing is most adequately represented by Sankhya, “number,” and since the precision of numbers requires meticulous

discernment, Sankhya is that darshana which involves a thorough discernment of reality and is expressed through the enumeration of diverse categories of existence. Philosophically, Sankhya is dualistic in its discernment of the Self (purusha) from the non-self (prakriti). In distinguishing sharply between purusha, Self or Spirit, on the one hand, and prakriti, non-self or matter, on the other, the Sankhya standpoint requires a rigorous redefinition of numerous terms used by various schools. Even though later Sankhya freely drew from the Vedic-Upanishadic storehouse of wisdom which intimates a rich variety of philosophical views, its earliest concern does not appear to have been philosophical in the sense of delineating a comprehensive conceptual scheme which describes and explains reality. Early Sankhya asked, "What is real?" and only later on added the question, "How does it all fit together?"

Enumerations of the categories of reality varied with individual thinkers and historical periods, but the standard classification of twenty-five tattvas or fundamental principles of reality is useful for a general understanding of the darshana. Simply stated, Sankhya holds that two radically distinct realities exist: purusha, which can be translated "Spirit," "Self" or "pure consciousness," and mulaprakriti, or "pre-cosmic matter," "non-self" or "materiality." Nothing can be predicated of purusha except as a corrective negation; no positive attribute, process or intention can be affirmed of it, though it is behind all the activity of the world. It might be called the Perceiver or the Witness, but, strictly speaking, no intentionality can be implied by these words, and so purusha cannot be conceived primarily as a knower. Mulaprakriti, however, can be understood as pure potential because it undergoes ceaseless transformation at several levels. Thus, of the twenty-five traditional tattvas, only these two are distinct. The remaining twenty-three are transformations or modifications of mulaprakriti. Purusha and mulaprakriti stand outside conceptual cognition, which arises within the flux of the other tattvas. They abide outside space and time, are simple, independent and inherently unchanging, and they have no relation to one another apart from their universal, simultaneous and mutual presence.

Mulaprakriti is characterized by three qualities or gunas: sattva or intelligent and noetic activity, rajas or passionate and compulsive activity, and tamas or ignorant and impotent lethargy, represented in the Upanishads by the colors white, red and black. If mulaprakriti were the only ultimate reality, its qualities would have forever remained in a homogeneous balance, without undergoing change, evolution or transformation. Since purusha is co-present with mulaprakriti, the symmetrical homogeneity of mulaprakriti was disturbed, and this broken symmetry resulted in a progressive differentiation which became the world of ordinary experience. True knowledge or pure

cognition demands a return to that primordial stillness which marks the utter disentanglement of Self from non-self. The process which moved the gunas out of their perfect mutual balance cannot be described or even alluded to through analogies, in part because the process occurred outside space and time (and gave rise to them), and in part because no description of what initiated this universal transformation can be given in the language of logically subsequent and therefore necessarily less universal change. In other words, all transformation known to the intellect occurs in some context—minimally that of the intellect itself—whilst the primordial process of transformation occurred out of all context, save for the mere co-presence of purusha and mulaprakriti.

This imbalance gave rise, first of all, logically speaking, to mahat or buddhi. These terms refer to universal consciousness, primordial consciousness or intellect in the classical and neo-Platonic sense of the word. Mahat in turn gave rise to ahankara, the sense of “I” or egoity. (Ahankara literally means “I-making.”) Egoity as a principle or tattva generated a host of offspring or evolutes, the first of which was manas or mind, which is both the capacity for sensation and the mental ability to act, or intellectual volition. It also produced the five buddhindriyas or capacities for sensation: shrota (hearing), tvac (touching), chaksus (seeing), rasana (tasting) and ghrana (smelling). In addition to sensation, ahankara gave rise to their dynamic and material correlates, the five karmendriyas or capacities for action, and the five tanmatras or subtle elements. The five karmendriyas are vach (speaking), pani (grasping), pada (moving), payu (eliminating) and upastha (procreating), whilst the five tanmatras include shabda (sound), sparsha (touch), rupa (form), rasa (taste) and gandha (smell). The tanmatras are called “subtle” because they produce the mahabhutas or gross elements which can be perceived by ordinary human beings. They are akasha (aether or empirical space), vayu (air), tejas (fire, and by extension, light), ap (water) and prithivi (earth).

This seemingly elaborate system of the elements of existence (tattvas) is a rigorous attempt to reduce the kaleidoscope of reality to its simplest comprehensible components, without either engaging in a reductionism which explains away or denies what does not fit its classification, or falling prey to a facile monism which avoids a serious examination of visible and invisible Nature. Throughout the long history of Sankhya thought, enumerations have varied, but this general classification has held firm. Whilst some philosophers have suggested alternative orders of evolution, for instance, making the subtle elements give rise to the capacities for sensation and action, Ishvarakrishna expressed the classical consensus in offering this classification of twenty-five tattvas.

Once the fundamental enumeration was understood, Sankhya thinkers arranged the tattvas by sets to grasp more clearly their relationships to one another. At the most general level, purusha is neither generated nor generating, whilst mulaprakriti is ungenerated but generating. Buddhi, ahankara and the tanmatras are both generated and generating, and manas, the buddhindriyas, karmendriyas and mahabhutas are generated and do not generate anything in turn. In terms of their mutual relationships, one can speak of kinds of tattvas and indicate an order of dependence from the standpoint of the material world.

No matter how subtle and elaborate the analysis, however, one has at best described ways in which consciousness functions in prakriti, the material world. If one affirms that purusha and prakriti are radically and fundamentally separate, one cannot avoid the challenge which vexed Descartes: how can *res cogitans*, thinking substance, be in any way connected with *res extensa*, extended (material) substance? Sankhya avoided the most fundamental problem of Cartesian dualism by willingly admitting that there can be no connection, linkage or interaction between purusha and prakriti. Since consciousness is a fact, this exceptional claim involved a redefinition of consciousness itself. Consciousness is necessarily transcendent, unconnected with prakriti, and therefore it can have neither cognitive nor intuitive awareness, since those are activities which involve some center or egoity and surrounding field from which it separates itself or with which it identifies. Egoity or perspective requires some mode of action, and all action involves the gunas, which belong exclusively to prakriti. Consciousness, purusha, is mere presence, *sakshitva*, without action, dynamics or content. Awareness, *chittavritti*, is therefore a function of prakriti, even though it would not have come into being—any more than anything would have evolved or the gunas would have become unstable—without the universal presence of purusha. Thus it is said that purusha is unique in that it is neither generated nor generating, whereas all other tattvas are either generating, generated or both.

In this view, mind is material. Given its capacity for awareness, it can intuit the presence of purusha, but it is not that purusha. All mental functions are part of the complex activity of prakriti. Consciousness is bare subjectivity without a shadow of objective content, and it cannot be said to have goals, desires or intentions. Purusha can be said to exist (*sat*)—indeed, it necessarily exists—and its essential and sole specifiable nature is *chit*, consciousness. Unlike the Vedantin *atman*, however, it cannot also be said to be *ananda*, bliss, for purusha is the pure witness, *sakshi*, with no causal connection to or participation in prakriti. Yet it is necessary, for the gunas could not be said to be active save in the presence of some principle of sentience. Without purusha there could be no

prakriti. This is not the simple idealistic and phenomenological standpoint summarized in Berkeley's famous dictum, *esse est percipi*, "to be is to be perceived." Rather, it is closer to the recognition grounded in Newtonian mechanics that, should the universe achieve a condition of total entropy, it could not be said to exist, for there would be no possibility of differentiation in it. Nor could its existence be denied. The presence of purusha, according to Sankhya, is as necessary as is its utter lack of content.

Given the distinction between unqualified, unmodified subjectivity as true or pure consciousness, and awareness, which is the qualified appearance of consciousness in the world, consciousness appears as what it cannot be. It appears to cause and initiate, but cannot do so, since purusha cannot be said to be active in any sense; it appears to entertain ideas and chains of thought, but it can in reality do neither. Rather, the action of the gunas appears as the activity of consciousness until the actual nature of consciousness is realized. The extreme break with previous understanding resulting from this realization—that consciousness has no content and that content is not conscious—is emancipation, the freeing of purusha from false bondage to prakriti. It is akin to the Vedantin realization of atman free of any taint of maya, and the Buddhist realization of shunyata. Philosophical conceptualization is incapable of describing this realization, for pure consciousness can only appear, even to the subtlest cognitive understanding, as nothing. For Sankhya, purusha is not nothing, but it is nothing that partakes of prakriti (which all awareness does).

Sankhya's unusual distinction between consciousness and what are ordinarily considered its functions and contents implies an operational view of purusha. Even though no properties can be predicated of purusha, the mind or intellect intuits the necessity of consciousness behind it, as it were. That is, the mind becomes aware that it is not itself pure consciousness. Since this awareness arises in individual minds, purusha is recognized by one or another egoity. Without being able to attribute qualities to purusha, it must therefore be treated philosophically as a plurality. Hence it is said that there are literally innumerable purushas, none of which have any distinguishing characteristics. The Leibnizian law of the identity of indiscernibles cannot be applied to purusha, despite the philosophical temptation to do so, precisely because philosophy necessarily stops at the limit of prakriti. Purusha is outside space and time, and so is also beyond space-time identities. Since the minimum requirements of differentiation involve at least an indirect reference to either space or time, their negation in the concept of indiscernibility also involves such a reference, and cannot be applied to purusha. Even though Sankhya affirms a plurality of purushas, this stance is less the result of metaphysical certitude than of the limitations imposed by consistency of

method. The plurality of purushas is the consequence of the limits of understanding.

Within the enormous and diverse history of Indian thought, the six darshanas viewed themselves and one another in two ways. Internally, each standpoint sought clarity, completeness and consistency without reference to other darshanas. Since, however, the darshanas were committed to the proposition that they were six separate and viable perspectives on the same reality, they readily drew upon one another's insights and terminology and forged mutually dependent relationships. They were less concerned with declaring one another true or false than with understanding the value and limitations of each in respect to a complete realization of the ultimate and divine nature of things. Whilst some Western philosophers have pointed to the unprovable Indian presupposition that the heart of existence is divine, the darshanas reverse this standpoint by affirming that the core of reality is, almost definitionally, the only basis for thinking of the divine. In other words, reality is the criterion of the divine, and no other standard can make philosophical sense of the sacred, much less give it a practical place in human psychology and ethics. In their later developments, the darshanas strengthened their internal conceptual structures and ethical architectonics by taking one another's positions as foils for self-clarification. Earlier developments were absorbed into later understanding and exposition. Historically, Sankhya assimilated and redefined much of what had originally belonged to Nyaya and Vaishesika, and even Mimamsa, only to find much of its terminology and psychology incorporated into Vedanta, the most trenchantly philosophical of the darshanas. At the same time, later Sankhya borrowed freely from Vedantin philosophical concepts to rethink its own philosophical difficulties.

Despite Sankhya's unique distinction between consciousness and awareness, which allowed it to preserve its fundamental dualism in the face of monistic arguments—and thereby avoid the metaphysical problems attending monistic views—it could not avoid one fundamental philosophical question: What is it to say that prakriti is dynamic because of the presence of purusha? To say that prakriti reflects the presence of purusha, or that purusha is reflected in prakriti, preserves a rigid distinction between the two, for neither an object reflected in a mirror nor the mirror is affected by the other. But Sankhya characterizes the ordinary human condition as one of suffering, which is the manifest expression of the condition of avidya, ignorance. This condition arises because purusha falsely identifies with prakriti and its evolutes. Liberation, mukti, is the result of viveka, discrimination, which is the highest knowledge. Even though viveka might be equated with pure perception as the sakshi or Witness, the process of attaining it suggests either an intention on the part of purusha or a response on the part of prakriti,

if not both. How then can purusha be said to have no relation, including no passive relation, to prakriti? Even Ishvarakrishna's enchanting metaphor of the dancer before the host of spectators does not answer the question, for there is a significant relationship between performer and audience.

Such questions are worthy of notice but are misplaced from the Sankhya standpoint. If philosophical understanding is inherently limited to the functions of the mind (which is an evolute of prakriti), it can encompass neither total awareness (purusha) nor the fact that both purusha and prakriti exist. This is the supreme and unanswerable mystery of Sankhya philosophy, the point at which Sankhya declares that questions must have an end. It is not, however, an unaskable or meaningless question. If its answer cannot be found in philosophy, that is because it is dissolved in mukti, freedom from ignorance, through perfect viveka, discrimination. In Sankhya as in Vedanta, philosophy ends where realization begins. Philosophy does not resolve the ultimate questions, even though it brings great clarity to cognition. Philosophy prepares, refines and orients the mind towards a significantly different activity, broadly called "meditation," the rigorous cultivation of clarity of discrimination and concentrated, pellucid insight. The possibility of this is provided for by Sankhya metaphysics through its stress on the asymmetry between purusha and prakriti, despite their co-presence. Prakriti depends on purusha, but purusha is independent of everything; purusha is pure consciousness, whilst prakriti is unself-conscious. Prakriti continues to evolve because individual selves in it do not realize that they are really purusha and, therefore, can separate themselves from prakriti, whilst there can never be complete annihilation of everything or of primordial matter.

Whereas Yoga accepted the postulates of Sankhya and also utilized its categories and classifications, all these being in accord with the experiences of developed yogins, there are significant divergences between Yoga and Sankhya. The oldest Yoga could have been agnostic in the sense implicit in the Rig Veda Hymn to Creation, but Patanjali's Yoga is distinctly theistic, diverging in this way from atheistic Sankhya. Whilst Sankhya is a speculative system, or at least a conceptual framework, Yoga is explicitly experiential and therefore linked to an established as well as evolving consensus among advanced yogins. This is both illustrated and reinforced by the fact that whereas Sankhya maps out the inner world of disciplined ideation in terms of thirteen evolutes—buddhi, ahankara, manas and the ten indriyas—Patanjali's Yoga subsumes all these under chitta or consciousness, which is resilient, elastic and dynamic, including the known, the conceivable, the cosmic as well as the unknown. Whereas Sankhya is one of the most self-sufficient or closed systems, Yoga retains, as a term and in its philosophy, a

conspicuously open texture which characterizes all Indian thought at its best. From the Vedic hymns to even contemporary discourse, it is always open-ended in reference to cosmic and human evolution, degrees of adeptship and levels of initiatory illumination. It is ever seeing, reaching and aspiring, beyond the boundaries of the highest thought, volition and feeling; beyond worlds and rationalist systems and doctrinaire theologies; beyond the limits of inspired utterance as well as all languages and all possible modes of creative expression. Philosophy and mathematics, poetry and myth, idea and icon, are all invaluable aids to the image-making faculty, but they all must point beyond themselves, whilst they coalesce and collapse in the unfathomable depths of the Ineffable, before which the best minds and hearts must whisper *neti neti*, “not this, not that.” There is only the Soundless Sound, the ceaseless AUM in Boundless Space and Eternal Duration.

## Yoga

Almost nothing is known about the sage [Patanjali] who wrote the *Yoga Sutras*. The dating of his life has varied widely between the fourth century B.C.E. and the sixth century C.E., but the fourth century B.C.E. is the period noted for the appearance of aphoristic literature. Traditional Indian literature, especially the Padma Purana, includes brief references to Patanjali, indicating that he was born in Illavrita Varsha. Bharata Varsha is the ancient designation of Greater India as an integral part of Jambudvipa, the world as conceived in classical topography, but Illavrita Varsha is not one of its subdivisions. It is an exalted realm inhabited by the gods and enlightened beings who have transcended even the rarefied celestial regions encompassed by the sevenfold Jambudvipa. Patanjali is said to be the son of Angira and Sati, to have married Lolupa, whom he discovered in the hollow of a tree on the northern slope of Mount Sumeru, and to have reduced the degenerate denizens of Bhotabhandra to ashes with fire from his mouth. Such legendary details conceal more than they reveal and suggest that Patanjali was a great Rishi who descended to earth in order to share the fruits of his wisdom with those who were ready to receive it.

Some commentators identify the author of the *Yoga Sutras* with the Patanjali who wrote the *Mahabhashya* or Great Commentary on Panini’s famous treatise on Sanskrit grammar sometime between the third and first centuries B.C.E. Although several scholars have contended that internal evidence contradicts such an identification, others have not found this reasoning conclusive. King Bhoja, who wrote a well-known commentary in the tenth century, was inclined to ascribe both works to a single author, perhaps partly as a reaction to others who placed Patanjali several centuries C.E. owing to his alleged implicit criticisms of late Buddhist doctrines. A more venerable tradition,

however, rejects this identification altogether and holds that the author of the Yoga Sutras lived long before the commentator on Panini. In this view, oblique references to Buddhist doctrines are actually allusions to modes of thought found in some Upanishads.

In addition to our lack of definite knowledge about Patanjali's life, confusion arises from contrasting appraisals of the Yoga Sutras itself. There is a strong consensus that the Yoga Sutras represents a masterly compendium of various Yoga practices which can be traced back through the Upanishads to the Vedas. Many forms of Yoga existed by the time this treatise was written, and Patanjali came at the end of a long and ancient line of yogins. In accord with the free-thinking tradition of shramanas, forest recluses and wandering mendicants, the ultimate vindication of the Yoga system is to be found in the lifelong experiences of its ardent votaries and exemplars. The Yoga Sutras constitutes a practitioner's manual, and has long been cherished as the pristine expression of Raja Yoga. The basic texts of Raja Yoga are Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, the Yogabhashya of Vyasa and the Tattvavaisharadi of Vachaspati Mishra. Hatha Yoga was formulated by Gorakshanatha, who lived around 1200 C.E. The main texts of this school are the Goraksha Sutaka, the Nathayoga Pradipika of Yogindra of the fifteenth century, and the later Shivasamhita. Whereas Hatha Yoga stresses breath regulation and bodily discipline, Raja Yoga is essentially concerned with mind control, meditation and self-study.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali is universal in the manner of the Bhagavad Gita, including a diversity of standpoints whilst fusing Sankhya metaphysics with bhakti or self-surrender. There is room for differences of emphasis, but every diligent user of Patanjali's aphorisms is enabled to refine aspirations, clarify thoughts, strengthen efforts, and sharpen focus on essentials in spiritual self-discipline. Accommodating a variety of exercises—mind control, visualization, breath, posture, moral training—Patanjali brings together the best in differing approaches, providing an integrated discipline marked by moderation, flexibility and balance, as well as degrees of depth in meditative absorption. The text eludes any simple classification within the vast resources of Indian sacred literature and a fortiori among the manifold scriptures of the world. Although it does not resist philosophical analysis in the way many mystical treatises do, it is primarily a practical aid to the quest for spiritual freedom, which transcends the concerns of theoretical clarification. Yet like any arcane science which necessarily pushes beyond the shifting boundaries of sensory experience, beyond conventional concepts of inductive reasoning and mundane reality, it reaffirms at every point its vital connection with the universal search for meaning and deliverance from

bondage to shared illusions. It is a summons to systematic self-mastery which can aspire to the summits of gnosis.

The actual text as it has come down to the present may not be exactly what Patanjali penned. Perhaps he reformulated in terse aphoristic language crucial insights found in time-honoured but long-forgotten texts. Perhaps he borrowed terms and phrases from diverse schools of thought and training. References to breath control, pranayama, can be found in the oldest Upanishads, and the lineaments of systems of Yoga may be discerned in the Maitrayana, Shvetashvatara and Katha Upanishads, and veiled instructions are given in the “Yoga” Upanishads—Yogatattva, Dhyana-bindu, Hamsa, Amritanada, Shandilya, Varaha, Mandala Brahmana, Nadabindu and Yogakundali—though a leaning towards Sankhya metaphysics occurs only in the Maitrayana. The Mahabharata mentions the Sankhya and the Yoga as ancient systems of thought. Hiranyagarbha is traditionally regarded as the propounder of Yoga, just as Kapila is known as the original expounder of Sankhya. The Ahirbudhnya states that Hiranyagarbha disclosed the entire science of Yoga in two texts—the Nirodha Samhita and the Karma Samhita. The former treatise has been called the *Yoganushasanam*, and Patanjali also begins his work with the same term. He also stresses *nirodha* in the first section of his work.

In general, the affinities of the Yoga Sutras with the texts of Hiranyagarbha suggest that Patanjali was an adherent of the Hiranyagarbha school of Yoga, and yet his own manner of treatment of the subject is distinctive. His reliance upon the fundamental principles of Sankhya entitle him to be considered as also belonging to the Sankhya Yoga school. On the other hand, the significant variations of the later Sankhya of Ishvarakrishna from older traditions of proto-Sankhya point to the advantage of not subsuming the Yoga Sutras under broader systems. The author of *Yuktidipika* stresses that for Patanjali there are twelve capacities, unlike Ishvarakrishna’s thirteen, that egoity is not a separate principle for Patanjali but is bound up with intellect and volition. Furthermore, Patanjali held that the subtle body is created anew with each embodiment and lasts only as long as a particular embodiment, and also that the capacities can only function from within. Altogether, Patanjali’s work provides a unique synthesis of standpoints and is backed by the testimony of the accumulated wisdom derived from the experiences of many practitioners and earlier lineages of teachers.

Some scholars and commentators have speculated that Patanjali wrote only the first three padas of the Yoga Sutras, whilst the exceptionally short fourth pada was added later. Indeed, as early as the writings of King Bhoja, one verse in the fourth pada (IV. 16) was recognized as a line interpolated from Vyasa’s seventh commentary in which he

dissented from Vijnanavadin Buddhists. Other interpolations may have occurred even in the first three padas, such as III.22, which some classical commentators questioned. The fact that the third pada ends with the word *iti* ("thus," "so," usually indicating the end of a text), as it does at the end of the fourth pada, might suggest that the original contained only three books. However, the philosophical significance of the fourth pada is such that the coherence of the entire text need not be questioned on the basis of inconclusive speculations.

Al-Biruni translated into Arabic a book he called *Kitab Patanjali* (The Book of Patanjali), which he said was famous throughout India. Although his text has an aim similar to the Yoga Sutras and uses many of the same concepts, it is more theistic in its content and even has a slightly Sufi tone. It is not the text now known as the Yoga Sutras, but it may be a kind of paraphrase popular at the time, rather like the *Dnyaneshwari*, which stands both as an independent work and a helpful restatement of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Kitab* translated by al-Biruni illustrates the pervasive influence of Patanjali's work throughout the Indian subcontinent.

For the practical aspirant to inner tranquillity and spiritual realization, the recurring speculations of scholars and commentators, stimulated by the lack of exact historical information about the author and the text, are of secondary value. Whatever the precise details regarding the composition of the treatise as it has come down through the centuries, it is clearly an integrated whole, every verse of which is helpful not only for theoretical understanding but also for sustained practice. The Yoga Sutras constitutes a complete text on meditation and is invaluable in that every sutra demands deep reflection and repeated application. Patanjali advocated less a doctrinaire method than a generous framework with which one can make experiments with truth, grow in comprehension and initiate progressive awakenings to the supernal reality of the Logos in the cosmos.

The word *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit verbal root *yuj*, "to yoke" or "to join," related to the Latin *ungere*, "to join," "to unite." In its broadest usages it can mean addition in arithmetic; in astronomy it refers to the conjunction of stars and planets; in grammar it is the joining of letters and words. In *Mimamsa* philosophy it indicates the force of a sentence made up of united words, whilst in *Nyaya* logic it signifies the power of the parts taken together. In medicine it denotes the compounding of herbs and other substances. In general, *yoga* and *viyoga* pertain to the processes of synthesis and analysis in both theoretical and applied sciences. Panini distinguishes between the root *yuj* in the sense of concentration (*samadhi*) and *yujir* in the sense of joining or connecting. Buddhists have used the term *yoga* to designate the withdrawal of the mind

from all mental and sensory objects. Vaishesika philosophy means by yoga the concentrated attention to a single subject through mental abstraction from all contexts. Whereas the followers of Ramanuja use the term to depict the fervent aspiration to join one's ishtadeva or chosen deity, Vedanta chiefly uses the term to characterize the complete union of the human soul with the divine spirit, a connotation compatible with its use in Yoga philosophy. In addition, Patanjali uses the term yoga to refer to the deliberate cessation of all mental modifications.

Every method of self-mastery, the systematic removal of ignorance and the progressive realization of Truth, can be called yoga, but in its deepest sense it signifies the union of one's apparent and fugitive self with one's essential nature and true being, or the conscious union of the embodied self with the Supreme Spirit. The Maitrayana Upanishad states: "Carried along by the waves of the qualities darkened in his imagination, unstable, fickle, crippled, full of desires, vacillating, he enters into belief, believing I am he, this is mine, and he binds his self by his self as a bird with a net. Therefore a man, being possessed of will, imagination and belief, is a slave, but he who is the opposite is free. For this reason let a man stand free from will, imagination and belief. This is the sign of liberty, this is the path that leads to brahman, this is the opening of the door, and through it he will go to the other shore of darkness."

Thus, yoga refers to the removal of bondage and the consequent attainment of true spiritual freedom. Whenever yoga goes beyond this and actually implies the fusion of an individual with his ideal, whether viewed as his real nature, his true self or the universal spirit, it is gnostic self-realization and universal self-consciousness, a self-sustaining state of serene enlightenment. Patanjali's metaphysical and epistemological debt to Sankhya is crucial to a proper comprehension of the Yoga Sutras, but his distinct stress on praxis rather than theoria shows a deep insight of his own into the phases and problems that are encountered by earnest practitioners of Yoga. His chief concern was to show how and by what means the spirit, trammelled in the world of matter, can withdraw completely from it and attain total emancipation by transforming matter into its original state and thus realize its own pristine nature. This applies at all levels of self-awakening, from the initial cessation of mental modifications, through degrees of meditative absorption, to the climactic experience of spiritual freedom.

Patanjali organized the Yoga Sutras into four padas or books which suggest his architectonic intent. Samadhi Pada, the first book, deals with concentration of mind (samadhi), without which no serious practice of Yoga is possible. Since samadhi is necessarily experiential, this pada explores the hindrances to and the practical steps needed to achieve alert quietude. Both restraint of the senses and of the discursive

intellect are essential for samadhi. Having set forth what must be done to attain and maintain meditative absorption, the second book, Sadhana Pada, provides the method or means required to establish full concentration. Any effort to subdue the tendency of the mind to become diffuse, fragmented or agitated demands a resolute, consistent and continuous practice of self-imposed, steadfast restraint, tapas, which cannot become stable without a commensurate disinterest in all phenomena. This relaxed disinterestedness, vairagya, has nothing to do with passive indifference, positive disgust, inert apathy or feeble-minded ennui as often experienced in the midst of desperation and tension in daily affairs. Those are really the self-protective responses of one who is captive to the pleasure-pain principle and is deeply vulnerable to the flux of events and the vicissitudes of fortune. Vairagya implies a conscious transcendence of the pleasure-pain principle through a radical reappraisal of expectations, memories and habits. The pleasure-pain principle, dependent upon passivity, ignorance and servility for its operation, is replaced by a reality principle rooted in an active, noetic apprehension of psycho-spiritual causation. Only when this impersonal perspective is gained can the yogin safely begin to alter significantly his psycho-physical nature through breath control, pranayama, and other exercises.

The third book, Vibhuti Pada, considers complete meditative absorption, sanyama, its characteristics and consequences. Once calm, continuous attention is mastered, one can discover an even more transcendent mode of meditation which has no object of cognition whatsoever. Since levels of consciousness correspond to planes of being, to step behind the uttermost veil of consciousness is also to rise above all manifestations of matter. From that wholly transcendent standpoint beyond the ever-changing contrast between spirit and matter, one may choose any conceivable state of consciousness and, by implication, any possible material condition. Now the yogin becomes capable of tapping all the siddhis or theurgic powers. These prodigious mental and moral feats are indeed magical, although there is nothing miraculous or even supernatural about them. They represent the refined capacities and exalted abilities of the perfected human being. Just as any person who has achieved proficiency in some specialized skill or knowledge should be careful to use it wisely and precisely, so too the yogin whose spiritual and mental powers may seem practically unlimited must not waste his energy or misuse his hard-won gifts. If he were to do so, he would risk getting entangled in worldly concerns in the myriad ways from which he had sought to free himself. Instead, the mind must be merged into the inmost spirit, the result of which is kaivalya, steadfast isolation or eventual emancipation from the bonds of illusion and the meretricious glamour of terrestrial existence.

In Kaivalya Pada, the fourth book which crowns the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali conveys the true nature of isolation or supreme spiritual freedom insofar as it is possible to do so in words. Since kaivalya is the term used for the sublime state of consciousness in which the enlightened soul has gone beyond the differentiating sense of “I am,” it cannot be characterized in the conceptual languages that are dependent on the subject-object distinction. Isolation is not nothingness, nor is it a static condition. Patanjali throws light on this state of gnosis by providing a metaphysical and metapsychological explanation of cosmic and human intellection, the operation of karma and the deep-seated persistence of the tendency of self-limitation. By showing how the suppression of modifications of consciousness can enable it to realize its true nature as pure potential and master the lessons of manifested Nature, he intimates the immense potency of the highest meditations and the inscrutable purpose of cosmic selfhood.

The metapsychology of the Yoga Sutras bridges complex metaphysics and compelling ethics, creative transcendence and critical immanence, in an original, inspiring and penetrating style, whilst its aphoristic method leaves much unsaid, throwing aspirants back upon themselves with a powerful stimulus to self-testing and self-discovery. Despite his sophisticated use of Sankhya concepts and presuppositions, Patanjali’s text has a universal appeal for all ardent aspirants to Raja Yoga. He conveys the vast spectrum of consciousness, diagnoses the common predicament of human bondage to mental ailments, and offers practical guidance on the arduous pathway of lifelong contemplation that could lead to the summit of self-mastery and spiritual freedom.

#### **Further Reading:**

- [Bhagavad Gita for Awakening](#) — The endless spiritual treasures of this essential scripture have been mined by saints, scholars, and devotees throughout the ages. Through a unique combination of exhaustive study and scholarship, and insight and wisdom gleaned from personal experience, Abbot George Burke’s commentary offers new gems that will enrich all true seekers.
- [Upanishads for Awakening](#) — Sanatana Dharma in its primal form is to be found in the Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitaryeya, Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, and Svetashvatara Upanishads. These eleven texts (upanishad means “teaching” –literally “that which was heard when sitting near”) are attached to the Vedas, the ancient hymns of the Indian sages, and also known as Vedanta, the End of the Vedas. These articles provide useful commentaries on these important scriptures. By Abbot George Burke
- [A Brief Sanskrit Glossary](#) — A great aid for students of Eastern thought, this glossary

illuminates the many sanskrit terms found in the scriptures and commentaries found on this site.