

THE PATANJALI REPORT



By Dan Brulé

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This article represents several hundred pages of journal notes recording personal study and lessons, jotted down and carried around for more than 20 years. It is a collection of ideas and thoughts about this legendary sage. It presents key bits and pieces of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. It includes ideas collected from many books, articles and conversations. It also contains personal insights gained thru dreams, intuition, and direct initiations and transmissions.

Patanjali is what you might call a yogi saint. He didn't invent yoga, but he mastered it. He was a mind-body scientist and a self-motivated independent life-explorer. He absorbed and integrated all the accumulated yogic wisdom of his day. And he organized it all into a simple and clear step-by-step method of holistic personal growth and genuine spiritual development. He attained liberation and he served as a living example of the yogic ideal of self-realization. And he gave us a tried and true method of awakening: a sure-fired practice of enlightenment.

The Yoga Sutras act to preserve and convey a profound spiritual teaching that Jesus referred to as the "Kingdom of Heaven," and what Lao Tse would call the "Tao." Patanjali's way is so much more about experience than it is about explanations. It has very little to do with understanding, and everything to do with action.

The sutras were probably sung or chanted for hundreds of years before they were actually written down. They were memorized and verbally repeated like mantras. They were passed on like a code through a direct living oral tradition. In studying the sutras today, we have to rely on what the earliest writers were able to capture for us; and what ancient and modern translators and interpreters have made available to us. But most of all, we have to rely on our own study and practice, our own experience and understanding. Only through our own actions and insights, can we lay claim to the awesome fruits of this knowledge and practice.

I once did a meditation, a prayer in fact, asking Patanjali to give to me the highest teaching. Here is what came through:

There's a part of you that has never been touched by anything that has happened in this world. Deep within you is a place of pure love and peace and freedom and joy and power. And this place has never been—nor can it ever be—lost or forgotten for long. This part of you cannot be altered, influenced or affected in anyway by anyone anywhere, including you! Awakening to this divine essence is called liberation or enlightenment. Whenever we touch this truth through the practice of breathwork or meditation—or even by accident—we experience undeniable moments of utter freedom, irreversible moments of total clarity, indescribable moments of profound peace. Living consciously in this state—and deliberately operating from it—is called self-realization. And we all have a natural inherent ability to awaken to—and to abide in—this purest state of ultimate human potential.

Patanjali summed up his understanding of life in a way that is similar to the Buddha. He said that suffering is inherent in the natural world of physical, mental and emotional phenomena. He said that suffering has a cause, and that it can be ended. And he taught the way to end suffering.

He taught essential yoga hundreds of years before hatha yoga—the most popular form of yoga in the world today—was even invented. His yoga teachings had nothing to do with complicated poses or difficult postures. To him, the perfect "asana" was any posture or position that kept the body from becoming an obstacle to meditation, a distraction from the inner work. The inner work involves mastering "kriyas:" actions that lead to liberation.

Patanjali reveals the underlying cause of all human suffering. And he demonstrates a way to end it. He identifies the major impediments or obstacles to liberation, and he provides a guaranteed

three-pronged strategy for overcoming them. He gives us three powerful yet often misunderstood keys to permanent freedom. They are: non-attachment, non-resistance, and non-judgment. And he pointed out that all three of these things were types of reactions. And so to me, the essence of his teachings is non-reaction.

He summarizes the causes of suffering in this way:

1. Yielding to a false sense of a separate self.
2. Not seeing things as they really are.
3. Succumbing to attachments and aversions.
4. Trying to use our fear of death to control life.

Suffering comes when we identify with the ego—with a mind-made, non-self; when we confuse what is real with what is not real, what is pure with what is not pure, when we treat facts as non-facts, and non-facts as facts. We create suffering when we allow our limited physical, emotional, and psychological habits, patterns and structures to determine our experience of life; when we allow our changing moods, states of health, and points of view to direct the course of our lives. We inherit suffering when we accept deadly deathist philosophies, theologies, and ideologies. We invite suffering when we allow fear to trump love, when we forget that love conquers fear.

Patanjali's teachings stand apart from the Buddha's in one way: he teaches the distinction between awareness and consciousness. And he reveals the relationship between consciousness and nature. He points out that consciousness is part of the natural phenomenal world, and as such, is distinct from awareness, which is something else, something entirely different. Awareness exists before and beyond consciousness and is totally independent of it. Awareness observes consciousness in the same way that you watch television. A television cannot see what's on its screen. It cannot watch itself. Consciousness is like a TV screen. Awareness (the real you) is the pure watcher!

He uses a beautiful analogy to describe what we can call enlightened consciousness. He describes it in terms of a perfect jewel or a flawless gem. And it seems that some of his followers or students, created an even better analogy for understanding and describing it: that is the analogy of water. I love it! It goes like this:

Water has two very interesting properties or qualities: transparency and reflectivity. When a body of water is clean, calm and still, it is like a perfect mirror. You can see yourself clearly reflected in it; and you can also see right down through it to the bottom. You can see what is moving about or suspended in it; and you can also see the sky above and the world around, reflected in it. But when the water is dirty and polluted, or when it is stirred up by waves on the surface, it loses its transparency, and it is no longer reflective.

So too with consciousness! Ideas and emotions, actions and attitudes—whether expressed or suppressed, whether positive or negative, whether chosen or inherited—produce waves and currents that block and distort true perception. But when the mind becomes quiet and still, when it is free of negative and limiting thoughts, it is able to express the truth of our being. When

consciousness is not stirred up by thoughts, feelings, sensations, emotions and reactions, it allows us to see through to the depths of life and to reality, to our essence.

It's as if our normal waking consciousness is like a funhouse carnival mirror that makes you look short and fat with a big swollen butt, or tall and thin with a tiny pointed head! You laugh, but in life we actually form judgments and make decisions about ourselves, others and the world, based on these distorted reflections and warped images!

The mind is a pattern-making, metaphor-generating, symbol-creating machine. Consciousness is made of the same stuff as everything else in the physical universe, and it is subject to the same principles, laws and dynamics. The problem is we have become identified with this operation or function of the mind, and with its collection of ideas and images. Breaking our identification with the mind opens the way to a direct experience of life and reality. When consciousness becomes still and quiet and spacious, it is more able clearly reflect the pure unlimited awareness that is our very Self (with a capital S).

The practice of meditation orients the mind toward stillness and spaciousness. It creates in us a tendency to move out of the reflective consciousness of the mind and into the pure awareness of the heart. We open to the possibility of a direct experience of life instead of living through the symbolic representations—the metaphors—conjured in consciousness. With practice, the conditioned mind stops being the middleman between us and life. Our limited thinking stops being the warped mirror, the colored filter, the distorted lens through which we view life.

Every thought, feeling, sensation, emotion, impulse, movement, desire, and every reaction to these things... every energetic rush, or block, or contraction... is an opportunity to practice the art of transcendence. When we can experience “what is, as it is” without reacting to it, or becoming attached to it, or identifying with it... we experience ecstasy, and we take a step toward pure awareness. Through this process and practice, we gain energy and momentum for self-realization. Every time we choose to simply breathe and relax, and to be a witness—the observer of psychological, emotional or physiological or energetic events—we get freer!

Patanjali taught that we should relate to both painful and pleasurable states with the same sort of detached neutral awareness. This attitude helps us to develop and support the stable state of stillness where perfect reflection and clarity can arise. Anything that stirs up our consciousness acts as a barrier to stillness. The most calming waves and currents are those that result from an attitude of friendliness, compassion, delight and equanimity toward all things, in us and around us, whether good or bad, painful or pleasant, whether mine or yours.

An important realization is that body, mind, senses, personality or ego are not necessarily impediments to realization. They need not be denied, abandoned, or destroyed. In fact, they need to be formed and shaped and guided—and made to serve our awakening!

Patanjali gives us a number of ways to dissolve barriers and overcome distractions:

1. Becoming absorbed in the movement of breath, in the breathing rhythm
2. When the breath pauses, become absorbed in the pause

3. Steadily observe new sensations as they arise
4. Experience luminous thoughts, thoughts that are free of sorrow
5. Focus on things that do not inspire attachment
6. Reflect on insights culled from dreams, reading, or learning
7. Become meditatively absorbed in the object of your desire

He recommends intense and persistent practice. How quickly we attain liberation depends on the level of our commitment. How would you characterize your commitment? Is it mild, moderate or intense? Is your desire for liberation or perfection just a casual thing, or is it a fire that consumes you? Is becoming free just a passing poetic interest, or is it a full time passionate quest?

To be free means to be independent of and unaffected by conditions and circumstances. It means we are no longer pushed or pulled or forced or bound by anything but love. Freedom is pure awareness abiding in itself, as itself. Freedom is not something that we can achieve through mental or physical effort: it is a natural intrinsic quality of life. If you are not experiencing this freedom right now, it's because you are doing something—consciously or unconsciously—to keep yourself from it!

The physical body and the physical universe are indivisible. You and everything else in existence are inseparable. Don't be disturbed or seduced by the play of opposites. They all exist within a single whole existence. Our work, our hobbies, our activities have to be aligned with this reality. That is what the Buddha called "right livelihood." Our relationships need to serve and promote awakening and to impede suffering. When they do, they are called "sacred relationships."

Ultimately, yoga is about transcending mind and ego, time and space, birth and death. Whole-hearted devotion and constant remembering are sure-fire strategies for success. Constantly projecting and protecting a sense of a separate self, certainly makes it difficult or impossible for us to wake up. Everything exists to serve our spiritual awakening. But unconsciousness, useless mental chatter, apathy, doubt, illness, pain, fatigue, and other things can interfere with our practice and distract us from the work.

Breathwork represents the cutting edge of mind-body science and the practice of genuine yoga today. Spiritual Breathing unites the visible and the invisible, the conscious and the unconscious. It connects us to the Source of Life. It orients us toward the Godhead. Conscious breathing is a way to put into practice the profound teachings of Patanjali. It helps to shift our focus, to free up energy, and to quiet and calm the mind. The breath fuels our most luminous thoughts, and it bridges our fragmented parts. With Breathwork we can strengthen and deepen our commitment to life, and empower ourselves to realize our highest aspirations.

If Patanjali were alive today, he would be doing breathwork!