

Yoga Philosophy-3:

What is Patañjali's scheme of the exposition of his subject?

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The fourfold plan

The Yoga-sūtra of Patañjali is the ultimate source text on Yoga. The scheme Patañjali envisages in presenting his subject is set out in the Yoga-sūtra (YS) itself (II.16...). This plan is conceived on the lines of the medical science. The two can be viewed side by side as follows:

PHILOSOPHY

- (1) Suffering,
- (2) The cause of suffering,
- (3) The release from suffering, i.e. liberation,
- (4) The means of release, i.e. Yoga.

MEDICAL SCIENCE

- (1) Disease,
- (2) The cause of disease,
- (3) The release from disease, i.e., cure,
- (4) The means of release. i.e., medicine.

This comparison should make it clear that Yoga is basically and broadly conceived of as a medical system with the difference that, while the latter focuses on physical illness, Yoga focuses on mental illness. Although psychology also focuses on mental illness, its approach relates to abnormalities in mundane life and is limited to life that is supposed to terminate with death. In contrast, the approach of Yoga relates to normalcy itself, is more fundamental and is not limited to a single life. Yoga conceives of the soul as a traveller from life to life, passing every time through the intermediate stage of death, in a series of lives that has no beginning but certainly an end. This series ends when the soul, through the knowledge of its own real nature, severs itself from the body complex with which it identifies itself through ignorance (*a-vidyā*).

Suffering: the Yoga outlook

For the ordinary person, life is a mixture of pleasure and pain; but for one with a philosophical outlook of the world as conceived by Patañjali, all worldly experience is, in the final analysis, only pain. This is because it sows in the mind the attitudes of attachment for the means of pleasure, and hatred for the causes of pain. These attitudes, in their turn, direct the actions of the soul, resulting in the creation of a depository of actions, 'action-stock', which entangles the soul further in worldly life and, consequently, in suffering. This exposition may raise the question as to how the same phenomenon may be viewed as pleasure by one and as pain by another. This difference in views is based on short term and long term approaches. Is not a drug a pleasure to a drug addict? And its non-availability, a pain? But a doctor views it as an evil.

The rationale of the Yoga outlook

This difference in outlooks is rooted in their being committed to short term and long term objectives, as is found even in the case of worldly objectives. The wise man often forgoes immediate small gains in view of larger future gains; and this natural inclination forms the basis of all economic plans, whether on an individual or social level. This is because, unlike most other animals, man has a sense of time and can plan for the future. This may not be considered as man's privilege, for even some other animals have an instinct to save for the future. Expand this natural wisdom to its maximum limit, and the Yoga outlook will be found reasonably vindicated. It is the culmination of the wisdom already in man.