

Themes of Yoga Philosophy

3. Suffering/*samsaara* and its cause, *a-vidyaa*

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The fourfold plan

The Yoga-suutra of Patanjali is the ultimate source of Yoga. The scheme Patanjali envisages in presenting his subject is set out in the Yoga-suutra (YS) itself (II.16...). This plan is conceived of on the lines of medical science. The two are viewed side by side:

PHILOSOPHY

- (1) Suffering,
 - (2) The cause of suffering,
 - (3) The release from suffering,
 - (4) The means of release.
- (1) Disease,

MEDICAL SCIENCE

- (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, while 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 severs itself, through the knowledge of its own real nature, from the body complex with which it is united through ignorance (*a-vidyaa*).

Suffering

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 Patanjali, all worldly experience is, in the final analysis, only pain. This is because it sows in 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 drug a pleasure to a drug addict? And its non-availability, a pain? But a doctor views it as an evil.

States of mind

The instrument of the experience of worldly suffering is the active mind which operates in five states, – right knowledge, erroneous knowledge, verbal knowledge, deep sleep and memory. It is interesting to note that sleep is regarded as an operative mode of mind, and not as a cessation thereof. Sleep is not the absence of cognition, but the cognition of the absence of worldly objects by the mind when other sense organs cease to function. The sole object of the mind in this state is the soul in its essential nature.

The cause of suffering

The YS is not satisfied with a treatment which relieves merely symptoms, giving temporary respite. Instead, it identifies the ultimate cause of the problem, *a-vidyaa* (ignorance), and its further manifestations of ego (*asmi-taa*), love (*raaga*), hatred (*dvesha*) and the urge to live (*abhi-nivesha*). Together, they are termed *kleshas*, sufferings, as they are the root cause of all suffering. *A-vidyaa* is defined as mistaking the perishable as lasting, the impure as pure, the painful as pleasurable, and the non-self as the self. It is, thus, not the absence of knowledge, but wrong knowledge, which is the adversary of true knowledge. *Asmi-taa* is the erroneous identification of the *purusha*, the conscious principle who is the observer (*drashtaa*), with the intellect (*buddhi*), which leads to its contact with worldly objects, the observed (*drishya*), resulting in the experience of worldly pleasure and pain. Love and hatred are bred by experiences of pleasure and pain respectively. The urge to live is an instinct found as much in a learned person as an ignorant one, and even in a tiny insect, which does not wish to die. This leads one to the hypothesis that there has been the painful experience of death in an earlier life. These *kleshas* breed action-stock and, consequently, birth, span of life and worldly experience. Latent impressions, *vaasanaas*, are instincts distinct from action-stock. Appropriate *vaasanaas* get manifested at the fruition of actions.

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