

11 Samkhya and Yoga

The *Sāmkhya* system of Kapila is said to have been existing during the seventh century B.C.E. However, the earliest available text on this philosophy is the commentary by Isvara Krishna of the third century C.E. The system is most notable for its theory of evolution and for its reduction of the numerous categories of Nyāya and Vaisesika to two fundamental ones, namely, *purusha* and *prakriti*, the former being understood as Universal Awareness and the latter as Universal energy. *Prakriti* is often translated as “Nature.” However, it is clear from the writing that the wider and larger definition of creative energy is what is meant by Kapila when he uses it. For him, “Nature” is part of the Universal Energy.

The Universal Energy has three modes (or *gunas*) of manifestation, according to Sāmkhya. As explained in Chapter 8, these are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Tamas* indicates inertia, *rajas* indicates activity and *sattva* is the equilibrium of the two. Everything that we see or experience in this world is the combination and recombination of these three *gunas*. When these three universal vibrations are held in equipoise, there is no action, according to the theory. It is only when there is a disturbance of the equilibrium that evolution begins. Universal Energy or *Prakriti* is unconscious and it is only through the presence of the conscious *Purusha* that evolution begins.

The process of evolution then follows a hierarchy of twenty-three categories or *tattvas*. In Sanskrit, *tattva* literally means “thatness.” *Mahat* is the first product. It is not material, but a mode of energy and is the basis of *buddhi* or Universal Intelligence. Just as we have, in the Upanishadic philosophy, distinguished between Universal Self (*Brahman*) and individual Self (*ātman*), though there is no “individuality” attached to the *ātman*, the Sāmkhya finds it convenient to designate Universal Intelligence by *Mahat* and individual intelligence by *buddhi*. *Buddhi* is that mode of energy that operates as intelligence and is the basis of all mental processes. Next in the hierarchy is *Ahamkāra*, or Ego, the self-sense. Three branches of evolution arise from *ahamkāra*. From its *sattva* aspect evolve

manas (or mind), the five organs of perception, five organs (or instruments) of action. From its *tamas* aspect evolve the subtle elements of nature, namely ether, air, fire, water and earth as well as the corresponding sensory vibrations of sound, touch, form, taste and smell. The *rajas* aspect provides the energy for this evolution.

It may be worthwhile to point out that the word *Sāmkhya* in Sanskrit indicates “number” and the system is distinguished by its emphasis on enumeration of creative principles. The two principles of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are its foundation. This is followed by the principle of three *gunas*. The five organs of perception together with *manas* and *ahamkāra* (making a total of seven) form the basic individual. *Manas* together with its organs of perception and organs of action, make a total of eleven principles that form the basis for all mental experience. These eleven together with *ahamkāra* and *buddhi*, making a total of thirteen, is the complete individual. If we consider *ahamkāra* and *manas*, the ten organs of perception and action, together with the five subtle elements of sound, touch, form, taste and smell, we get seventeen principles. These seventeen together with *Buddhi* and *Prakriti* give us nineteen. Finally, the number of principles evolving out of *Prakriti* is twenty-three.

In this system, sentiency arises only from the presence of the *Purusha*. *Prakriti* is not an evolute. The seven, namely, *mahat*, *ahamkāra*, together with the five subtle elements (sound, touch, form, taste and smell) are evolutes and evolvents. That is, they have come out of *Prakriti* and the five gross elements (ether, air, fire, water and earth) have come out of these. We must remember that the latter five do not refer to any “material” elements, but rather the principles represented by them.

In contrast to the method of knowledge listed in *Nyāya*, the *Sāmkhya* lists only three: perception, inference and valid testimony as the means. The *Sāmkhya* philosophy states that the method of comparison or analogy has been explicitly left out since it is included in the method of inference. “Knowledge of objects beyond the senses comes from inference based on analogy. ... Non-perception may be because of extreme distance, extreme proximity, injury to organs, non-steadiness of the mind, subtlety, veiling, suppression and blending with what is similar. The non-perception of *Prakriti* is due to its subtlety, not to its non-existence, since it is perceived in its effects.”⁹³

⁹³ S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, p. 428.

Prakriti is material and it includes everything seen and unseen. Vivekananda explains, “What we call matter in modern times was called ... *bhutas*, the external elements. There is one element which according to them, is eternal; every other element is produced out of this one. It is called *ākāsha*. ... Along with this element, there is the primal energy called *prāna*. *Prāna* and *ākāsha* combine and recombine and form the elements out of them. ... The *ākāsha*, acted upon by the repeated blows of *prāna*, produces *vāyu*, or vibrations ... giving rise to heat, *tejas*. Then this heat ends in liquefaction, *āpah*. ... All that we know in the form of motion, vibration, or thought is a modification of the *prāna*, ... and everything that we know in the shape of matter, ... is a modification of the *ākāsha*. ... You have never seen force without matter, or matter without force; what we call force and matter are simply the gross manifestations of these same things, which, when superfine, are called *prāna* and *ākāsha*. *Prāna* you can call in English life, the vital force; but you must not restrict it to the life of man; at the same time you must not identify it with Spirit, *ātman*. ... Creation cannot have either a beginning or an end; it is an eternal ongoing.”⁹⁴

From the union of *purusha* and *prakriti*, Sāmkhya says, the insentient *prakriti* appears sentient. After stratifying the mental processes of cognition into various categories, the theory says that “Just as a picture does not exist without a substrate, or a shadow without a post or the like, so too the cognitive apparatus does not subsist supportless, without what is specific, that is, a subtle body (*linga sarira*). Formed for the sake of the spirit's purpose, the subtle body acts like a dramatic actor, on account of the connection of “causes and effects” and by union with the all-embracing power of *prakriti*. ... This evolution from the will down to the specific elements, is brought about by the modifications of *prakriti*. This work is done for the emancipation of each spirit, and thus is for another's sake, though appearing as if it were for the sake of *prakriti* herself.”⁹⁵ Vivekananda amplifies this passage from Sāmkhya as follows. “Why does nature do all this? Nature is undergoing all these changes for the development of the soul; all this creation is for the benefit of the soul so that it may be free. This immense book which we call the universe is stretched out before man so that he may read; and he

⁹⁴ S. Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 435 - 436.

⁹⁵ S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore, A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, p. 439-442.

discovers eventually that he is an omniscient and omnipotent being.”⁹⁶ Thus, according to Sāmkhya, the *purusha* has somehow become identified with *prakriti* and this is the source of bondage. The role of *prakriti* is to liberate us from this identification. Kapila, the author of Sāmkhya, says there is no need to postulate the existence of “God”, if we take this word to mean “The First Cause.” Causation is a concept and as such is a mental evolute. In this sense, *purusha* and *prakriti* are both eternal as they are not mental evolutes. Such a startling conclusion in this ancient period is fascinating in itself. It echoes the conclusions of modern astrophysics. In his book, A Brief History of Time, the celebrated physicist Stephen Hawking writes, “The idea that space and time may form a closed surface without boundary also has profound implications for the role of God in the affairs of the universe. With the success of scientific theories in describing events, most people have come to believe that God allows the universe to evolve according to a set of laws and does not intervene in the universe to break these laws. However, the laws do not tell us what the universe should have looked like when it started - it would still be up to God to wind up the clockwork and choose how to start it off. So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?”⁹⁷

Thus, Sāmkhya denies the “creation theory.” The *purusha* somehow has identified itself with *prakriti* and appears to be bound. The purpose of *prakriti* is to liberate the spirit (or *purusha*) from this apparent identification. The 3rd century C.E. commentator, Isvara Krishna, writes in his explanation of Sāmkhya, “Verily no spirit is bound; nor does any migrate; nor is any emancipated. Nature alone, having many vehicles, is bound, migrates, and is released. Bondage, migration and release are ascribed to the spirit, in the same manner as defeat and victory are attributed to the king, though actually occurring to his soldiers, because it is the servants that take part in the undertaking, the effects of which - grief or profit - accrue to the king. In the same manner, experience and emancipation, though really belonging to Nature, are attributed to the spirit, on account of the non-discrimination of spirit from Nature.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 2, p. 439.

⁹⁷ S. Hawking, A Brief History of Time, p. 140-141.

⁹⁸ S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore, A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, p. 444.

The Yoga philosophy of Patanjali, founded in the 2nd century B.C.E., accepts the Sāmkhya metaphysics, with only one difference. Namely, it introduces a “First Teacher” called Isvara, and in this sense, may be classified as theistic. In the large however, the philosophy is a practical discipline for the mind. Thus, it suspends metaphysical speculation for the majority of the treatise and focuses on meditation and psychic control. It is often called *rāja yoga*, or the kingly path, and brief references were made in the Bhagavadgīta, as part of the four-fold yoga.

The work is a masterpiece in psychology as it lays the foundations for a science of the mind. According to Patanjali, all knowledge comes through the power of concentration of the mind and the Yoga Sutras describe the art and science of mental concentration. Vivekananda writes in his characteristic humorous style, “Every science must have its own method of investigation. If you want to become an astronomer and sit down and cry ‘Astronomy! Astronomy!’ it will never come to you. The same with chemistry. A certain method must be followed. You must go to a laboratory, take different substances, mix them up and compound them, experiment with them and out of that will come a knowledge of chemistry. If you want to be an astronomer, you must go to an observatory, take a telescope, study the stars and planets, and then you will become an astronomer. ... It is comparatively easy to observe facts in the external world, for many instruments have been invented for that purpose, but in the internal world, we have no instrument to help us. Yet we know we must observe in order to have a real science. Without a proper analysis, any science will be hopeless - mere theorizing. And that is why all the psychologists have been quarelling among themselves since the beginning of time, except those few who found out the means of observation. The science of raja yoga ... proposes to give us such a means of observing the internal states. The instrument is the mind itself.”⁹⁹

The treatise begins with the following definition of yoga: *yoga chittavritti nirodhah*, which means “yoga is the restraint of mental modifications.” Here, the word “yoga” is being used in the sense of mental concentration. Essentially, this means that yoga is the control of thought and feeling, referred to here as ‘mental modifications.’ “They are restrained by practice and non-attachment (*abhyāsa and vairāgya*). Practice is the repeated effort to follow the disciplines which give

⁹⁹ Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 129.

permanent control of the thought-waves of the mind. It becomes firm when it has been cultivated for a long time, uninterruptedly, with earnest devotion. Non-attachment is self-mastery; it is freedom from desire for what is seen or heard.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, we see in these verses that the emphasis is on practice, or repeated effort guided by an eager view of the end to be attained. The end is the knowledge of the Self, the *ātman*. Patanjali says that the human mind is usually in one of five general states: wandering (*ksipta*), forgetful (*mūdha*), occasionally steady or distracted (*viksipta*), one-pointed (*ekāgra*) and restrained (*niruddha*). It is the last two states of mind that are essential for the realisation of the *ātman*. Normally, our minds only experience the first three states. The highest state of mind, according to Patanjali, is the state of *samādhi*, or perfect understanding. It is said to be of two kinds, “with image” (or *savikalpa*) and “without image” (or *nirvikalpa*). The last stage is characterised by the fact that there is no thought wave in the mind, it is perfectly still and supremely aware of itself. Thus, it is an identity with the state of *Brahman* described in the Upanishads. It is most unfortunate that many modern expositions of the work translate *samādhi* as “trance” and this is totally inaccurate for it is not a state of stupor or daze as is commonly connoted by the word, but rather a state of higher consciousness, or as Vivekananda would say, “superconsciousness.”

The treatise now begins to explain concentration of mind. “Concentration upon a single object may reach four stages: examination or questioning (*vitarka*), reflection or discrimination (*vichāra*), joyful peace (*ānanda*) and unqualified egoism.”¹⁰¹ This aphorism can be understood by relating it to the process of research or learning. Examination or inquiry (*vitarka*) refers to isolating what is to be attended to. For instance, when we have many things to do, we are confused since we don’t know where to begin. The only way to complete a task is to begin. The Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu put it more poetically, when he said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” Thus the first step in concentrating the mind is to determine what to concentrate it on, to prioritize, to isolate the task before us and then, to begin.

Quest and question are cognates. In our quest for knowledge of the external world or the internal world of our own mind, we may begin by questioning. Thus, once we have determined what we must focus on, we may begin a process of questioning. Through proper questioning, we slowly concentrate the mind. If we

¹⁰⁰ S. Prabhavananda, Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ S. Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 210.

stop this questioning simply because the question is difficult, the process of questioning ends and the mind slips back into its distracted state. However, the mind can be gradually focussed by refinement of the questioning process, which leads to finer knowledge and as one reflects upon this finer knowledge, one experiences a 'joyful peace,' the 'Eureka' moment or what has been labelled as a 'peak experience' in modern psychology which is accompanied by a feeling 'I know' or 'I understand.' Beyond this stage of the mind lies the stage of 'unqualified egoism,' where one experiences the sense of 'I' without any object. This stage is reminiscent of the state Buddha experienced just before he attained *nirvāna*.

“The concentration is achieved through faith, energy, recollectedness, absorption and illumination.”¹⁰² We have met the word *śraddhā* earlier and have given it the translation of 'faith'. Let us recall that this 'faith' is two-fold, one in our own ability to achieve the goal and two, that the goal can be attained. If we examine our mind, we will find that there is always a powerful undercurrent of "background thought." The initial stages of concentration can be said to be of "house-cleaning type" where we remove gross distractions. Such external distractions are easily removed, but the internal ones such as thinking that one is not capable or incompetent are a little harder to eradicate. However, this feeling of inability is slowly removed through practice combined with an exercise of energizing the mind. This energy can be derived from the study of great lives and examples. By the recollection of their luminous example, concentration is sustained.

Now comes a remarkable idea that diverges from the Sāmkhya view which distinguishes the Yoga system from the other systems. The steady stream of knowledge has always been flowing. This mighty river of teaching¹⁰³ can be traced back to time immemorial. "Isvara is the Teacher of even the ancient teachers, being not limited by time. Its manifesting word is Om." Patanjali goes on to say that the mind can be gathered and focussed by awareness of the principle of Isvara.

¹⁰² Swami Prabhavananda, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, p. 26.

¹⁰³ In Indian mythology, the great God Siva or Mahadeva, symbolises Isvara. The river Ganges is said to flow from his head and this represents the river of knowledge or the river of teaching. The goddess of learning is called Saraswati, and literally means 'she of the stream, the flowing movement.' Aurobindo writes, "It is a natural name both for a river and for the goddess of inspiration." (see S. Aurobindo, Collected Works, Vol. 10, p. 88.)

Here then, we find the value of study. But this study must inspire and we often find in life that it is life that inspires life. Thus, a study of great lives energizes the mind and gathers it for the purpose of concentration. We are reminded of the famous quotation of Sir Isaac Newton, who said, "If I have been able to see this far, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." We also see why many of the Upanishads give us a listing of how the teaching has been handed down from generation to generation. From my own experience, I can certify that such an awareness is a powerful motivation sustaining purpose and keeping the mind focussed. This is what Patanjali means by "devotion to Isvara."¹⁰⁴

What is gained by this devotion? Patanjali says that all mental obstacles are destroyed. This is quite a departure from the methods of modern psychoanalysis. Mental obstacles are not destroyed by direct confrontation, but rather by devotion to the "mighty river of teaching and example." This is corroborated by daily experience. When we give attention to anything, that very thing becomes magnified. Thus, the way to diminish the effect of mental obstacles is to keep focussed on the goal "through devotion to Isvara," according to Patanjali. What are the obstacles? "Disease, mental laziness, indecision, carelessness, sloth, sensuality, mistaken notion, missing the point, and instability cause distraction of the mind."¹⁰⁵

In this philosophy, once the goal has been fixed to be concentration of mind, ethics and moral principles are deduced as corollaries to aid the mind in concentration. "Undisturbed calmness of mind is attained by cultivating friendliness towards the happy, compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and indifference toward the wicked."¹⁰⁶ Our relationships with other fellow beings do have an effect upon the mind and when we sit for meditation, the impressions may come to disturb it. Let us observe that these moral and ethical attitudes are to be cultivated so that the mind can learn to be calm. The last part, "indifference toward the wicked," is especially worth noting. It is now an acknowledged fact that any form of strong hatred towards anything is indicative of a mental complex. We may have a view but we need not be worked up about it. Vivekananda explains, "These attitudes of the mind towards the different subjects

¹⁰⁴Verse 23 of the Yoga Sutras in S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore, A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, p. 458.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 459.

¹⁰⁶ Swami Prabhavananda, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, p. 40.

that come before it will make the mind peaceful. Most of our difficulties in our daily lives come from being unable to hold our minds in this way. For instance, if a man does evil to us, instantly we want to react [with] evil, and every reaction in the form of hatred or evil is so much loss to the mind.”¹⁰⁷ This does not mean that we are complacent when something wrong has been done, but rather we must learn to act without attachment to rectify it, if we are able to do it. Otherwise, we must adopt the attitude of indifference.

In all of this, we must keep in mind the targeted audience of the writing. What is being described is meditation for the recluse, or *raja yoga*. It is not *karma yoga* as was encountered in the teaching of the *Bhagavadgīta*, where emphasis was laid on action without attachment. This *yoga* is also action, but action directed in the realm of the mind, and these instructions are preparations for the mind before meditation.

Patanjali offers another method for calming the mind, namely, rhythmic breathing. This leads to an entire subsection of the treatise called *prāṇayāma*, or the regulation of the breath. We can observe that when we are disturbed, our breathing becomes irregular. At such moments, it is best to sit alone and to calm oneself through rhythmic breathing. Once the mind has been calmed, one can go further by taking up a single idea for meditation, such as the “light within” or “an illumined soul.” This gives rationale for the religious iconography of the world. Concentration of mind can also be achieved “by fixing the mind upon any divine form or symbol that appears to one as good.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, as the mind learns to contemplate, it becomes subtle and at the same time wide in its vision.

Now comes a very important psychological principle that we had met earlier in the *Maitri Upanishad*. “As one thinks, so one becomes.” Patanjali writes, “Becoming like a transparent crystal on the modifications disappearing, the mind acquires the power of thought transformation (*samāpatti*), the power of appearing in the shape of whatever object is presented to it, be it the knower, the knowable, or the act of knowing.”¹⁰⁹ The comparison is made to a piece of transparent crystal. Just as the crystal becomes coloured by the colour of the object placed before it, the mind becomes similarly colored by the thought or idea it holds. It then comes into contact with the matrix of associations represented by the idea.

¹⁰⁷ Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 222.

¹⁰⁸ Swami Prabhavananda, *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ S. Radhakrishnan and C. Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, p. 460.

This contact has three aspects: word (*śabda*), meaning (*artha*) and knowledge (*jnāna*) or deeper meaning. In the initial approach to meditation, these three are mingled together and the mind is not able to separate them. As one goes deeper, the mind can separate these and see the “meaning” alone or “the meaning of the meaning.” Ultimately, the mind reaches the state of “seedless samadhi.”

The method to enable the mind to reach this level of awareness is called *ashtanga yoga*, or the eight-limbed yoga. These are listed as restraints (*yama*), observances (*niyama*), posture (*āsana*), regulation of breath (*prāṇayāma*), drawing in the senses (*pratyahāra*), concentration (*dhāraṇa*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and transcendence (*samādhi*). The restraints (*yama*) are five in number: non-injury (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satyam*), non-stealing (*āsteya*), austerity (*brahmachārya*), and non-possession (*aparigraha*). These five embody ethical principles derived for the explicit purpose of concentrating the mind. As such, they are not mere external observances, but rather observances of the mind. Thus, ahimsa refers to non-injury in thought, word and deed. Not only is this non-injury to others, but also non-injury to oneself. In the *Vivekachudamani*, we find “He who having obtained a human birth... does not exert himself to gain self-knowledge, verily commits suicide for he kills himself by clinging to things which are unreal.”¹¹⁰ Thus all of these have both an outer component and inner component. Truthfulness is to be practiced in thought, word and deed and the same applies to the other restraints. Hence the practice of truth has both an outer component in our relation to others. But it also has an inner component in how relate to ourselves. Are we true to ourselves? The last one, (*aparigraha*) or non-possession may require further elaboration. It refers to the tendency of the mind to be greedy, to be grasping or to extend the “tentacles of selfishness” outward. It also applies to our tenacious grip on our thoughts and feelings. Often we hold on to a dogma or a creed and seek comfort from it. *Aparigraha* implies non-attachment as an ideal amplified in the Gita. Thus we see that mastery even of the first step of this yoga will make one into a saint.

The observances (*niyama*) are also five in number: cleanliness (*śauca*), contentment (*santōsha*), austerity (*tapas*), study (*svādhyāya*) and devotion to Isvara (*isvarapranidhāna*). Again, as these are preparations for meditation, they have two components, external and internal. We have explained in detail the notion of austerity (*tapas*) in an earlier lecture. Let us understand the last two. By study is meant not only a study of writing that increases one’s understanding

¹¹⁰ Vivekachudamani, Chapter 1, verse 4.

of the external world, but more importantly, the study of one's own mind which consists in reflection. This gives one greater control of one's own mind. Finally, by "devotion to Isvara" is meant the awareness of the "river of Teaching" flowing since time immemorial, as a background thought.

In this part of the treatise, Patanjali describes a profound psychological principle that one can use to manipulate one's own mind. "To obstruct thoughts which are inimical to yoga, contrary thoughts should be brought."¹¹¹ Vivekananda explains, "For instance, when a big wave of anger has come into the mind, how are we to control that? Just by raising an opposite wave. Think of love. Sometimes a mother is very angry with her husband, and while in that state, the baby comes in, and she kisses the baby; the old wave dies out and a new wave arises, love for the child."¹¹² We can see this principle in operation in daily life. Suppose we are disturbed and someone you like walks in and brings you some exciting news. Our mood changes immediately, not gradually. Patanjali writes that this principle can be used with great effect in the control of the mental waves of thought and feeling.

Posture (*āsana*) and regulation of breathing (*prāṇayāma*) must also be practiced as a means of achieving control of the mind. Over the millenia, these two steps have been expanded upon by the yogis into a series of stretching and breathing exercises. These disciplines were then encoded as *hatha yoga* and form part of the raja yoga discipline. It is this system of physical exercise that has gained prominence, especially in Europe and North America, and it is most unfortunate that this is the popular idea of "yoga." However, as we see, the origins of *hatha yoga* are in Patanjali's yoga sutras and form a means for the mind to reach higher levels of awareness.

It may be useful to make some remarks concerning posture and the control of mind. The essential idea for Patanjali is to keep the spinal column straight. This gives strength to the mind. One can see this everyday. When we slouch, it is not only bad for the body, but slowly the mind becomes sluggish. Gradually, a tendency of laziness engulfs the mind. Thus, by controlling posture, we can manipulate the mind into a higher mood. When one is not feeling that good, a brisk ten minute walk is often a great help in bringing cheerfulness to the mind. Such physical techniques are part of raja yoga and come under the heading of *āsana* and *prāṇayāma*.

¹¹¹ Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p.261.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 261.

Restraint of sense organs (*pratyahāra*) is to be combined with concentration (*dhāraṇa*). When we contemplate an abstract idea, we automatically withdraw the senses from the external world. Essentially what is being referred to is the out-going tendency of the mind and this must be restrained. For example, when we sit to do some creative work, we find we are unable to start. This is just restlessness of the mind and the best way to eliminate it is simply to begin the work at hand. Through effort, the restlessness disappears.

In his inimitable way, Vivekananda describes the restless mind as follows. “Well has it been compared to the maddened monkey. There was a monkey, restless by his own nature, as all monkeys are. As if that were not enough someone made him drink freely of wine, so that he became still more restless. Then a scorpion stung him. When a man is stung by a scorpion, he jumps about for a whole day; so the poor monkey found his condition worse than ever. To complete his misery a demon entered into him. What language can describe the uncontrollable restlessness of that monkey? The human mind is like that monkey, incessantly active by its own nature; then it becomes drunk with the wine of desire, thus increasing its turbulence. After desire takes possession comes the sting of the scorpion of jealousy at the success of others, and last of all the demon of pride enters the mind, making it think itself of all importance. How hard to control such a mind!”¹¹³

The best way to deal with this restlessness, according to Patanjali, is to put the mind on some creative work and to keep it engaged. Another way, which is more difficult, is to simply watch the bubbling of thoughts in a detached way and slowly, as one observes them, the oscillations decrease. Usually, we identify with the thought as it arises. The essence of *pratyahara* is not to identify with the thought wave as soon as it rises, but to watch it.

The next two stages are *dhāraṇa* and *dhyāna*. “*Dhāraṇa* is holding the mind on to some particular object [or idea]. An unbroken flow of knowledge in that object [or idea] is *dhyāna*.”¹¹⁴ Thus, *dhāraṇa* is concentration, and *dhyāna* is continued concentration. The latter refers to the ability of maintaining concentration once attained. Often in life, we find that the mind becomes concentrated and inspired

¹¹³ Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 174.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 270.

but has a tendency of not staying in that state for too long. In *dhāraṇa*, we must increase the stamina for sustained concentration.

The final stage is *samādhi* or total absorption. Patanjali writes that the three, *dhāraṇa*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi*, comprise *samyama* and are to be taken together. This process has been compared to the trajectory of a three stage rocket, where the lower stages drop off at an appropriate time so that the rocket can be propelled into higher reaches of space. In a similar way, concentration merges into meditation, which finally culminates in *samādhi*.

According to the Yoga philosophy, all spiritual personalities of history have either attained this state of mind or have approximated it. Without a systematic scientific discipline, some have stumbled upon it. Others have approached it more scientifically. Vivekananda writes, “There is a great danger in stumbling upon this state. In a good many cases there is the danger of the brain being deranged, and as a rule, you will find that all those men, however great they were, who had stumbled upon the superconscious state without understanding it, groped in the dark, and generally had, along with their knowledge, some quaint superstition. ... To get any reason out of the mass of incongruity we call human life, we have to transcend reason, but we must do it scientifically, slowly, by regular practice, and we must cast off all superstition. We must take up the study of the superconscious state just as any other science. On reason we must have to lay our foundation, we must follow reason as far as it leads, and when reason fails, reason itself will show us the way to the highest plane. When you hear a man say, ‘I am inspired,’ and then talk irrationally, reject it. Why? Because these three states - instinct, reason and superconsciousness, or the unconscious, conscious and superconscious states - belong to one and the same mind. There are not three minds in one man, but one state of it develops into the others. Instinct develops into reason, and reason into transcendental consciousness. ... Real inspiration never contradicts reason, but fulfils it.”¹¹⁵

In conclusion, the Yoga philosophy is in essence a science of the human mind. Much of the treatise is directed towards describing methods of attaining higher states of awareness. Yet, Patanjali cautions that our approach must be scientific, guided by reason and experience. Its remarkable insights into the workings of the human mind, its practical techniques can be applied by everyone in their psychic

¹¹⁵ Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. 1, p. 185.

journey for ultimate understanding. Later, this system is absorbed into the Vedanta philosophy as part of its four-fold yoga, already encountered briefly in the Bhagavadgīta.