

Theosophical Meditation

Part 3 of 3 – Sunday 9th February 2020

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

These excerpts are from the *first* of the four “books” or sections quoted from William Q. Judge’s Theosophy Company edition. For the ancient Indian sage Patanjali, real Yoga was mental Yoga, the science of concentrated meditation known as Raja Yoga. Aphorism 2 and the explanatory comment upon it are the most important and summarise the core practice simply and clearly.

2. **Concentration, or Yoga, is the hindering of the modifications** of the thinking principle.
WQJ: So “concentration” is equivalent to the correction of a tendency to diffuseness, and to the obtaining of what the Hindus call “*one-pointedness,*” or the power to apply the mind, at any moment, to the consideration of a single point of thought, to the exclusion of all else. Upon this Aphorism the method of the system hinges...
12. The hindering of the modifications of the mind already referred to, is to be effected by means of **Exercise and Dispassion.**
13. **Exercise is the uninterrupted, or repeated, effort** that the mind shall remain in its unmoved state.
14. This exercise is a firm position observed out of regard for the end in view, and perseveringly adhered to for a long time without intermission.
WQJ: The student must not conclude from this that he can never acquire *concentration* unless he devotes every moment of his life to it, for the words “without intermission” apply but to the length of time that has been set apart for the practice.
15. **Dispassion is the having overcomes one’s desires.**
WQJ: That is – the attainment of a state of being in which the *consciousness* is unaffected by passions, desires, and ambitions, which aid in causing modifications of the mind.
30. The **obstacles** in the way of him who desires to attain *concentration* are Sickness, Languor, Doubt, Carelessness, Laziness, *Addiction to objects of sense*, Erroneous Perception, Failure to attain any stage of abstraction, and Instability in any state when attained.
31. These obstacles are accompanied by grief, distress, trembling, and sighing.
32. For the prevention of these, one truth should be dwelt upon. [An accepted truth which one approves of.]
33. Through the practicing of **Benevolence, Tenderness, Complacency, and Disregard for objects of happiness, grief, virtue, and vice**, the mind becomes *purified*.
34. Distractions may be combatted by a regulated control or management of the breath in inspiration, retention, and exhalation. [NB, this is not the injurious Hatha Yoga practice of holding one’s breath.]
35. A means of procurement of steadiness of the mind may be found in an immediate **sensory cognition**;
36. Or, an immediate cognition of a **spiritual subject** being produced, this may also serve to the same end;
37. Or, the thought taking as its object some one **devoid of passion** – as, for instance, an ideally pure character – may find what will serve as a means;
38. Or, by **dwelling on knowledge that presents itself in a dream**, steadiness of mind may be procured;
39. Or, it may be effected by **pondering upon anything that one approves.**
40. The student whose mind is thus steadied *obtains a mastery* which extends from the Atomic to the Infinite.
41. The mind that has been so trained that the ordinary modifications of its action are not present, but only those which occur upon the conscious taking up of an object for contemplation, is changed into the likeness of that which is pondered upon, and enters into full comprehension of the being thereof.

The Preface says WQJ's edition is offered as an interpretation: "No liberties have been taken with the system of the great Sage, but the endeavor has been faithfully to interpret it to Western minds unfamiliar with the Hindu modes of expression, and equally unaccustomed to their philosophy and logic.

"THIS BOOK IS LAID UPON THE ALTAR OF MASTERS' CAUSE, AND IS DEDICATED TO THEIR SERVANT H. P. BLAVATSKY."
([Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms](#))

DHARANA, DHYANA, SAMADHI

"It is well to pursue some kind of practice, and pursue it either in a fixed place, or in a mental place which cannot be seen, or at night. The fact that what is called Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi may be performed should be known. [6th, 7th & 8th stage of Patanjali.]

"Dharana is selecting a thing, a spot, or an idea, to *fix* the mind on. [Attention] 6th Limb

"Dhyana is *contemplation* of it. [Contemplation] 7th Limb

"Samadhi is *meditating* on it. [Meditation] 8th Limb

"When attempted, they of course are all one act.

"Now, then, take what is called the well of the throat or pit of the throat.

1st. Select it.—Dharana.

2d. Hold the mind on it.—Dhyana.

3d. Meditate on it.— Samadhi.

This gives *firmness of mind*.

"Then select the spot in the head where the Sushumna nerve goes. Never mind the location; call it the top of the head. Then pursue the same course. This will give some insight into spiritual minds. At first it is difficult, but it will grow easy by practice. If done at all, the same hour of each day should be selected, as creating a habit, not only in the body, but also in the mind. Always keep the direction of Krishna in mind, namely, that it is done for the whole body corporate of humanity, and not for one's self."

(WQJ, "[Letters That Have Helped Me](#)" p. 29)

"He who would hear the voice of *Nada*, "the Soundless Sound," and comprehend it, he has to learn the nature of *Dharana*."

"*Dharana*, is the intense and perfect concentration of the mind upon some one interior object, accompanied by complete abstraction from everything pertaining to the external Universe, or the world of the senses." ("The Voice of the Silence" p. 1 and explanatory note by HPB on p. 73, original 1889 edition)

REAL RAJA YOGA IS MENTAL, NOT PHYSICAL

"*Raj Yoga* encourages no sham, *requires no physical postures*.¹ It has to deal with the inner man whose sphere lies in the world of thought. To have the highest ideal placed before oneself and strive incessantly to rise up to it, is the only *true concentration recognized by Esoteric Philosophy* which deals with the inner world of *noumena*, not the outer shell of *phenomena*. The first requisite for it is *thorough purity of heart*.

Well might the student of Occultism say, with Zoroaster, that purity of thought, purity of word, and purity of deed, – these are the essentials of one who would rise above the ordinary level and join the "gods."... I, at any rate, am unable to prescribe any specific posture for the kind of *incessant contemplation* that I recommend....

"Let us now see what kind of contemplation (or meditation) the *Elixir of Life* [an article published in "Five Years of Theosophy"] recommends for the aspirants after occult knowledge. It says: – "Reasoning from the known to the unknown, meditation must be practised and encouraged." That is to say, a *chela's* meditation should constitute the "*reasoning from the known to the unknown*." The "known" is the phenomenal world,

¹ No postures in the sense of special positions nor the lotus position, but simply to sit comfortably in a chair and with the spine kept straight and vertical, the head upright and level. As Damodar says here Raja Yoga (Raja meaning *king*), asks us to adopt certain and particular *mental* positions, not physical ones.

cognizable by our five senses. And all that we see in this manifested world are the effects, the causes of which are to be sought after in the noumenal, the unmanifested, the “unknown world:” this is to be accomplished by meditation, *i.e.*, continued attention to the subject. Occultism does not depend upon one method, but employs both the deductive and inductive. The student must first learn the general axioms. For the time being, he will of course have to take them as assumptions, if he prefers to call them so....

“These axioms have sufficiently been laid out [in original Theosophy]... what the student has first to do is to comprehend them and, by employing the *deductive method, to proceed from universals to particulars*. He has then to reason from the “known to the unknown,” and see if the *inductive* method of proceeding from *particulars to universals* supports those axioms. This process forms the primary stage of true contemplation. The student must first grasp the subject *intellectually* before he can hope to realize his aspirations.

“When this is accomplished, then comes the next stage of meditation which is “the inexpressible yearning of the inner man to ‘go out towards the infinite.’” Before any such yearning can be properly directed, the goal, to which it is to be its aim to run, must be determined by the preliminary stages. The higher stage, in fact, consists in realizing practically what the first steps have placed within one’s comprehension.

“Reflection or contemplation... teaches the student that to comprehend the noumenal, he must identify himself with Nature. Instead of looking upon himself as an isolated being, he must learn to look upon himself as a part of the INTEGRAL WHOLE. For, in the unmanifested world, it can be clearly perceived that all is controlled by the “Law of Affinity,” the attraction of one to the other. ***There, all is Infinite Love, understood in its true sense.***

“The first thing to be done is to study the axioms of Occultism and work upon them by the deductive and the inductive methods, which is real contemplation. To turn this to a useful purpose, what is theoretically comprehended must be practically realized.”

(Damodar K. Mavalankar, “Contemplation,” [“Theosophical Articles and Notes”](#) p. 43, 45-48)

As implied above, *meditation and study of spiritual truths are to be found in a fine balance.*

“By perfection in study and meditation the Supreme Spirit becomes manifest; study is one eye to behold it, and meditation is the other.” (“*Gems from the East,*” precepts and axioms compiled by HPB)

NOT TO FOCUS ON LIGHTS, PICTURES, SOUNDS, OR SENSATIONS THAT ARISE

“In regard to the pictures which you see [while meditating], observe them with indifference, relying always on the Higher Self, and looking to it for knowledge and light, pictures or no pictures.”

(WQJ, “Letters That Have Helped Me” p. 122)

“When a student starts upon the path and begins to see spots of light flash out now and then, or balls of golden fire roll past him, it does not mean that he is beginning to see the real Self – pure spirit. A moment of deepest peace or wonderful revealings given to the student, is *not* the awful moment when one is about to see his spiritual guide, much less his own soul. Nor are psychical splashes of blue flame, nor visions of things that afterwards come to pass, nor sights of small sections of the astral light with its wonderful photographs of past or future, nor the sudden ringing of distant fairy-like bells, any proof that you are cultivating spirituality. These things, and still more curious things, will occur when you have passed a little distance on the way, but they are only the mere outposts of a new land which is itself wholly material, and only one remove from the plane of gross physical consciousness. The liability to be carried off and intoxicated by these phenomena is to be guarded against.... It is certain that any student who devotes himself to these astral happenings will see them increase. But were our whole life devoted to and rewarded by an enormous succession of phenomena, it is also equally certain that the casting off of the body would be the end of all that sort of experience, without our having added really anything to our stock of true knowledge.”

(WQJ, “Astral Intoxication” article)

“Those . . . who worship some particular God – or, if they so prefer, the one ISWAR [THE SELF] under some particular name – are too apt to attribute every psychological effect, induced by mental concentration during the hours of religious meditation to their special deity, whereas, in 99 cases out of 100, such effects are due simply to purely *psycho-physiological* effects. We know a number of mystically-inclined people who see . . . “lights” . . . as soon as they concentrate their thoughts... The modern Occultists say that, when not directly due to cerebral action whose normal functions are certainly impeded by such an artificial

mode of deep concentration – these lights are glimpses of the Astral Light, or, to use a more *scientific* expression – of the “Universal Ether” firmly believed in by more than one man of science. . . Like the pure blue sky closely shrouded by thick vapours on a misty day – is the Astral Light concealed from our physical senses during the hours of our normal, daily life. But when concentrating all our spiritual faculties, we succeed, for the time being, to paralyze their enemy – physical senses, and the inner man becomes, so to say, distinct from the man of matter, then, the action of the ever-living spirit, like a breeze that clears the sky from its obstructing clouds – sweeps away the mist which lies between our normal vision and the Astral Light, and we obtain glimpses into, and of, that Light.”

(H. P. Blavatsky, “[Theosophical Articles and Notes](#)” p. 105)

... but remember “the whole astral world is a mass of illusion; people see into it, and then, through the novelty of the thing and the exclusiveness of the power, they are bewildered into thinking they actually see true things, whereas they have only removed one thin crust of dirt.”

(William Q. Judge, “Elementals and Elementaries” in the “[Conversations on Occultism](#)” series of articles)

NOT TO DWELL IN THE PSYCHIC (pass on through, out of the Second Hall)

If thou would'st cross the first Hall safely [the waking consciousness], let not thy mind mistake the fires of lust that burn therein for the sunlight of life.

If thou would'st cross the second* safely [the psychic state], stop not the fragrance of its stupefying blossoms to inhale. If freed thou would'st be from the karmic chains, seek not for thy Guru in those Mayavic regions.

The WISE ONES tarry not in pleasure-grounds of senses.

The WISE ONES heed not the sweet-tongued voices of illusion.

The name of the third Hall is WISDOM, beyond which stretch the shoreless waters of AKSHARA, the indestructible Fount of Omniscience. (The region of the full Spiritual Consciousness beyond which there is no longer danger for him who has reached it.) (“[The Voice of the Silence](#)” pp. 6-7, 75, original 1889 edition)

* The astral region, the Psychic World of supersensuous perceptions and of deceptive sights — the world of mediums. It is the great "Astral Serpent" of Eliphaz Levi. No blossom plucked in those regions has ever yet been brought down on earth without its serpent coiled around the stem. It is the world of the Great Illusion.

~ ~ ~

“Stop all attempts at clairvoyance... because it leads them [clairvoyants] slowly but surely - almost beyond recall into an interior and exterior passive state where the will is gradually overpowered and they are at last in the power of the demons who lurk around the threshold of our consciousness. Above all, follow no advice to "sit for development." Madness lies that way.

“The feathery touches which come upon the skin while trying these experiments are said by mediums to be the gentle touches of “the spirits.” But they are not. They are caused by the ethereal fluids from within us making their way out through the skin and thus producing the illusion of a touch. When enough has gone out, then the victim is getting gradually negative [i.e. psychically passive], the future prey for spooks and will-o'-the-wisp images.”
(WQJ, “[Shall We Teach Clairvoyance?](#)” article)

“In the way of meditation, DON'T GET PASSIVE; danger lies that way. Be active in all things. The giddiness will pass away in time; the change with all its disturbances, mental, and otherwise, has doubtless acted upon the nerve-currents and circulatory system. The way to overcome disturbance, of course, is by mental and physical *calmness*; this should be maintained. Medical assistance should be used for the body at times, because the “mental attitude” brings about changes in the body – for the most part gradually – but which sometimes needs material aid in becoming co-ordinated; so do not despise medical aid should any need arise.”
(Robert Crosbie, “The Friendly Philosopher” p. 21-22)

“Do not try to open up conscious communication with beings on other planes. It is not the time and danger lies that way, because of the power of creating one's own images, and because of the power and disposition of the dark forces to simulate beings of Light, and render futile your efforts to reach the goal.”
(RC, “The Friendly Philosopher” p. 14)

“MEDITATION, CONCENTRATION, WILL” BY WILLIAM Q. JUDGE

Many reading and thinking students say **“they must meditate, they declare a wish for concentration, and they would like a powerful will, and they sigh for strict directions**, readable by the most foolish theosophist. It is a western cry for a curriculum, a course, a staked path, a line and rule by inches and links. Yet the path has long been outlined and described, so that **any one could read the directions whose mind had not been half-ruined** by modern false education, memory rotted by the superficial methods of a superficial literature and a *wholly vain modern life*.

“Let us divide Meditation into two sorts. First is the meditation practiced at a set time, or an occasional one, whether by design or from physiological idiosyncrasy. Second is the meditation of an entire lifetime, that single thread of intention, intentness, and desire running through the years....

“For the first, in Patanjali’s Aphorisms will be found **all needful rules and particularity**. If these are studied and not forgotten, **then practice must give results**. How many of those who reiterate the call for instruction on this head have read that book, only to turn it down and never again consider it? Far too many.

“The mysterious subtle thread of a life meditation is that which is practiced every hour by philosopher, mystic, saint, criminal, artist, artisan, and merchant. It is pursued in respect to that on which the heart is set; it rarely languishes; at times the meditating one greedily running after money, fame, and power looks up briefly and sighs for a better life during a brief interval, but the passing flash of a dollar or a sovereign recalls him to his modern senses, and the old meditation begins again. Since all theosophists are here in the social whirl I refer to, they can every one take these words to themselves as they please. Very certainly, if their life meditation is fixed low down near the ground, the results flowing to them from it will be strong, very lasting, and related to the low level on which they work. Their semi-occasional meditations will give precisely semi-occasional results in the long string of recurring births.

“But then,” says another, “what of concentration? We must have it. We wish it; we lack it.” Is it a piece of goods that you can buy it, do you think, or something that will come to you just for the wishing? Hardly. In the way we divided meditation into two great sorts, so we can divide concentration. One is the use of an already acquired power on a fixed occasion, the other the deep and constant practice of a power that has been made a possession. Concentration is not memory, since the latter is known to act without our concentrating on anything, and we know that centuries ago the old thinkers very justly called memory a phantasy.

“But by reason of a peculiarity of the human mind the associative part of memory is waked up the very instant concentration is attempted. It is this that makes students weary and at last drives them away from the pursuit of concentration. A man sits down to concentrate on the highest idea he can formulate, and like a flash troops of recollections of all sorts of affairs, old thoughts and impressions come before his mind, driving away the great object he first selected, and concentration is at an end. This trouble is only to be corrected by practice, by assiduity, by continuance. No strange and complicated directions are needed. All we have to do is to try and to keep on trying.

“The subject of the Will has not been treated of much in theosophical works, old or new. Patanjali does not go into it at all. It seems to be inferred by him through his aphorisms. Will is universal, and belongs to not only man and animals, but also to every other natural kingdom. The good and bad man alike have will, the child and the aged, the wise and the lunatic. It is therefore a power devoid in itself of moral quality. That quality must be added by man. So the truth must be that will acts according to desire, or, as the older thinkers used to put it, “behind will stands desire.”... **Will and Desire lie at the doors of Meditation and Concentration. If we desire truth with the same intensity that we had formerly wished for success, money, or gratification, we will speedily acquire meditation and possess concentration.**

“If we do all our acts, small and great, every moment, for the sake of the whole human race, as representing the Supreme Self, then every cell and fibre of the body and inner man will be turned in one direction, resulting in perfect concentration. This is expressed in the New Testament in the statement that if the eye is single the whole body will be full of light, and in the *Bhagavad Gita* it is still more clearly and comprehensively given through the different chapters. In one it is beautifully put as the lighting up in us of the Supreme One, who then becomes visible. Let us meditate on that which is in us as the Highest Self, concentrate upon it, and will to work for it as dwelling in every human heart.” (emphasis added)

CONCLUSION TO THE SERIES, A FEW WORDS ABOUT RAJA YOGA

Helpful and beneficial meditation practices are of course to be found in many different traditions, religions, and philosophies. A few of them complement well that which has been shared in these three handouts. The material covered in our sessions, if practised seriously and consistently, will be found more than sufficient, leaving it unnecessary to try to also engage in various Buddhist, Hindu, and other meditation systems, unless one particularly wants to. What Theosophy provides is particularly and safely designed and suited for the Western world, unacquainted as it is with occult practices.

In “Letters That Have Helped Me” p. 73-75, Mr Judge explains:

“It is not the desire of the Brotherhood... to have members think that Eastern methods are to be followed, Eastern habits adopted, or the present East made the model or the goal. The West has its own work and its duty, its own life and development. Those it should perform, aspire to and follow, and not try to run to other fields where the duties of other men are to be performed. . . . The new era of Western Occultism definitely began in 1875 with the efforts of that noble woman who abandoned the body of that day not long ago. This does not mean that the Western Occultism is to be something wholly different from and opposed to what so many know, or think they know, as Eastern Occultism. . . . It has, as its mission, largely entrusted to the hands of the Theosophical Society, to furnish to the West that which it can never get from the East; to push forward and raise high on the circular path of evolution now rolling West, the light that lighteth every man who cometh into the world – the light of the true Self, who is the one true Master for every human being; all other Masters are but servants of that true One; in it all real Lodges have their union.”

One may ask “Is *Raja Yoga* the best way” as a practical path of inner development?

While the answer is yes, we note the *Raja Yoga of Theosophy* is not quite the same as the Hindu sage Patanjali’s *Raja Yoga*, nor Adi Shankaracharya’s (formulator of the Hindu Advaita Vedanta)... nor it is at all the same as that promoted by some prominent modern movements!

“The Voice of the Silence” and other writings of H. P. Blavatsky show that *there is* a truly esoteric Raja Yoga system which is greater in detail, depth, and effect, than that anything publicly available. A few brief hints about it are given but not very much. It has commonalities with Patanjali’s and Shankara’s systems but it *incorporates the Bodhisattva Path and the Paramitas*, things found in Buddhism not Hinduism. In its higher levels it is the Path of Chelaship, leading to initiation and Adeptship – i.e. becoming, at some distant point, one of the Masters of Wisdom. It is thus the real Practical Occultism.

But for those who are not yet ready for such lofty heights, it is still practical and accessible, for its everyday message and system is simple enough if approached with determination, mindfulness and patience.

HPB’s “Theosophical Glossary” entry for “Raja-Yoga” defines it as “The true system of developing psychic and spiritual powers and union with one’s *Higher Self* – or the Supreme Spirit, as the profane express it,” but doesn’t mention meditation by name. It summarises Raja Yoga as “The exercise, regulation and concentration of thought.” This may not sound especially exciting or thrilling but it is rewarding. It is the Yoga of *Life*. To sit down and practice meditation can be a part of it – and it is of course recommended that we endeavour to do so – but **our 24/7 life is our most important meditation.**

Each day, endeavour to live life consciously, harmlessly, and at the highest point of consciousness possible. Continually make the effort, regardless of what you may be doing, to keep the consciousness elevated and the mind concentrated. Remember the Self in all things and all things in the Self. Do what you can to help and serve others, in the spirit of divine Compassion.

This concludes the three part series

The United Lodge of Theosophists

62 Queen’s Gardens London W2 3AH

www.theosophy-ult.org.uk