

Raja Yoga Email Course
Class #59

As we enter into the third chapter of the Yoga Sutras, the important rungs of the ladder of Yoga assigned as dharana, dhyana, and samadhi are being encountered for our collective and individual study. In this lesson we will take up the first two of these limbs, leaving the subject of samadhi for lesson 60. All students are encouraged to revisit the early chapters (padas) already studied so as to enforce all new knowledge taken in from this ongoing process of Jnana Yoga. There is the first chapter, called Samadhi pada; the second chapter, called Sadhana Pada; the third chapter, now under study, called Vibhuti Pada; and soon to come we will study the fourth chapter, called Kaivalya Pada. To begin this lesson, we look into the responses from the previous lesson by students of the Raja Yoga list, to see what concerns and insights are surfacing in the course of this profound spiritual exercise.

A student from Hawaii writes:

QUESTION #1: "What is best: the "I am" perspective of the Self, or the Emptiness view?"

BABAJI: This is an important question. For the best results, an aspirant should learn to hold a many-sided and all-inclusive perspective. This is necessary in order to move past all mental blocks and intellectual conundrums. Philosophy is for developing greater understanding, not for debate and argumentation. Acceptance of other views and respect for those who hold them are important. But for moving on in one's own spiritual trajectory, the Great Ones, like Lord Buddha, have always emphasized the "I-am" as the consummate way. The Dhammapada makes this clear. The "I am not" way is excellent for the preceding stages of practice, however. Synthesis is best, and holding more than one view is possible, even preferable. Holding no views, depending how that expression gets interpreted, runs the danger of courting worldliness on one side, or nihilism on the other.

Having one view as your own, and holding other dharmic views as supports, is best — like a wheel with one felly but many spokes, as the Vedic Rishis said. As the Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna put it, simply: "The cows all mix in the field in the daytime, but when the farmer brings them home at night and places them in the barn, they each get their own stall." You can well figure, I think, the meaning of this saying in the present context.

QUESTION 2: "What does 'Practicing the Presence of God' mean? I have never heard of this."

BABAJI: "Practicing the Presence of God" is a well-known saying in spiritual circles, even among modern westerners who value and court higher Awareness. But it demands a path and a teacher. Lord Vasishtha states that being without these two while seeking truth is like "trying to grow crops only at night." Despite what some deluded individuals say, practice is not to be considered overrated. The pseudo-advaitists have it all wrong when they opine that one need not do anything because one is already the Self. "One is not the Self until one realizes the Self" is a better proceeding point. To work hard (sadhana) proves the fact of nonduality to the mind, which previous to that dawning is still ensconced in relativity (maya). That is why most of us are "here" — to realize our

true nature under the harshest, most trying of circumstances. Seeing through illusion will free us for all time, beyond time.

So, spiritual aspirants practice the presence of God, which to differing schools and their adherents means things like observing one's inner Nature, developing Witness Consciousness, becoming aware of the Atman, and the like. It is a good phrase in that it leaves the method to each individual while accenting the existence of the actual Essence Itself. May all move into this superlative practice, each in their own way and to their own capacity.

A student from Pennsylvania writes:

QUESTION: "I came upon a great word in relation to sutra #55! From the book Jivan Mukti Viveka, Vasishtha is quoted on page #312 as saying: "The inward cool — antahsitalata — tranquility, of the one who sees this world as only the combination of the three modes (gunas) and which is not-self, is called concentration." Oh, to remain unconnected to the phenomenal world! Swami Vidyanaraya continues the explanation that this 'coolness' is the result/form of the effacement of latent impressions, or 'quenching of thirst' necessary for the next gift of dissolution of the mind. Would you comment?"

BABAJI: Though I am not fond of the translation of the English here, nor the wordage used, the point by Lord Vasishtha is well taken. Further, the point of Yoga is not to be "unconnected," (how is that possible?) but to connect, then transcend. All the while that these two movements are being attained, all things of a relative nature merely return to their sources and origins — whether that be in the body, senses, mind, intellect, or ego...or the Word, in deeper respects. The result of this spiritual undertaking is equanimity, the "inward cool" spoken of here (trying to bring the sloka into current and popular verbiage makes it suffer, methinks). Lord Vasishtha was a great one for recommending the course of uncovering origins, called utpatti, wherein — similar to both Sankhya and Yoga — one observes outer phenomena, meditates upon it in increments (the tattvas), and thereby traces it back inside to stations such as the mind, the intelligence, and the Word. What else but a pervasive feeling of "inner cool" could come from such a journey? In Yoga, the solution for fear is the study of nature and phenomena with the detached and honed mind. When one sees all within the self/Self, brooding and doubt fly away forever. Om, Peace, Peace, Peace!

A student from Hawaii writes:

QUESTION: "Last night I re-read the Chapter 7 elucidation very slowly and carefully, digesting all the wisdom contained within. I am still at the Yama/Niyama stage of course, with the goal of purifying thought, word, and deed, as well as gaining contentment and peace of mind. I am practicing pranayama but the goal of control of prana seems overwhelming and in the distant future. Control of the prana would mean I could heal long distance and slow down my heart-rate to almost nothing. It would mean I would gain powers which I would have to be very conscious not to use, correct? There must be a mid-stage control of prana that opens the door to samadhi and enlightenment and that does not require complete mastery, right?"

BABAJI: Stages of growth are noticed along the path, no doubt, even those which have to do with the gaining of power via mastery over the prana. It is a precarious stage in

itself, to be sure, and one that many aspirants fall in. I mean, you can well imagine! The sleeping individual, having ignorance of all that is great and grand, suddenly comes to find that the mere breathing process is replete with power, and then begins to see that power, prana, flowing in everything. Previous to that awakening life had been drab, restricted, devoid of any real vitality. Worse still, all of human construct and convention had been fabricated around those very limitations.

And all of this involves the early to mid-stages of mastery. Complete mastery has to do specifically with Consciousness, not energy (and certainly not with mere matter). Many, those caught in what the Great Master called “the tricks of prana,” do not realize this. As Vedanta states, Consciousness as Consciousness, and Brahman as Consciousness — quintessential axioms like these escape inspection by those flying low under the radar of higher Awareness. They do not detect it. As the Svetasvataropanisad says, which is also the newest meditation chant that the SRV students are presently memorizing:

Te dhyanyoganugata apashyan
devatmashaktim svagunairnigudham
yah karanani nikhilani tani
kalatma yuktanya-adhitisthat yekah

“Practicing the Yoga of Meditation, those rishis saw the indwelling Self and its divine energy, which though veiled by its own gunic obstructions, was nevertheless one with Ultimate Reality, and which previously had been imperceptible due to the limitations of their own intellects.”

This sloka is very fine, demonstrating, as it does, how Reality is always present (though we have to “practice” that Presence) but remains undetectable, even inconceivable to most, due to mental impurities. Remove those and, as the Upanisads state, “It shines through naturally of Its own true nature.”

QUESTION #2: “In the meantime, my karma is becoming instant, and that I am grateful for. Every angry thought brings pain, every emotional reaction brings quick repercussions, every flippant comment stabs me in the back, every failure to forgive creates unhappiness. Also, I am perceiving my sciatica disability as a wake up call. It is much better as a result, and I am moving normally now and can go back to work this week. I am also contemplating release of all desires and thereby having momentary experiences of relief when I attain that state, however brief. I am now ready for Chapter 8 — well, in a way I am ready, but knowing that it will bring me to the actual study of the aphorisms, I will go back and re-read the first 7 chapters for continued clarity. I do have a question about predestination. I resist that concept because I want to believe that I can influence the future by conscious choices made in the present. Are we born with the script of our life in relative existence already written? even attempts to create desired futures? Ah, it is the “d” word, desire. If my grandson is very sick and destined to die young, then there is nothing to be done? But then maybe I am predestined to try, and also predestined to either fail or succeed?”

BABAJI: In previous lessons the principle of predestination has been taken up. Please search for and read those. But as for your specific questions here, when you speak of influencing the future by conscious choices, that is karma and will at work, not predestination. It is true that, in a series of lifetimes with their attending karmas the

transmigrating soul has fixed a regimen of seed-causes in the mind which will then naturally get figured as effects into all events to come. We can see, then, that even so-called predestination is really only karma in action, in fructification. If we speak of the Divine Will, and Its patent decisions, even then we need not cower about helplessly in the face of our own ill-considered acts and decisions of the past, for as Holy Mother has told us, "What the Mother of the Universe has written in the book of destiny, She can also erase." That power which comprehension of the laws of karma invests us with enables us to go beyond destiny, even predestination, since that was/is all our own doing anyway. "What you sow you must reap," as the saying goes. But for the Vedantist, the Yogini, what the spiritual aspirant after freedom must say is, "What you sow you can unsow," so that you do not have to reap what you do not want. Sadhana, spiritual self-effort, accomplishes the neutralization of past karmas. And for what has already fructified, which we must face up to (i.e., this lifetime, this body) remaining focused on Reality will handle that for us by what Shankara calls "closeness to Brahman." So, do your sadhana, practice the presence, and try to live in a nondual state. All will even out. Follow the dictates of your chosen path and the advice of your precious guru; never quit or give up.

QUESTION #3: "Swamiji writes 'Take this book: as a book it does not exist outside, what exists outside is unknown and unknowable...The real universe is the occasion of the reaction of the mind...These vrittis are our universe.' Is he saying that it is impossible to have an objective experience of reality? Or is he saying that the book does not actually exist in physical form. I understand and accept that thought projection and this person I imagine myself to be do not exist. It is all smoke in the wind. However I do believe that there is a world of matter and that if I cease to be and all sentient beings vanish from the face of the earth, the physical universe will remain. I do not understand how everything that exists is mere thought projection. I understand the 24 cosmic principles and that the most subtle forms are the cause of grosser forms. I suppose these kind of ideas and concepts can only be understood through direct experience beyond all ideas and concepts, correct? In direct experience the mind is gone, or at least the vrittis have dissolved (into cosmic mind?) and the lake is crystal clear. Then Reality can be perceived. Is the book part of that Reality?"

BABAJI: Swamiji is not saying that it is impossible to have an objective experience of this world and its objects, he is saying that it is not possible to know the object as it seems due to its lack of real substance (which is why mere experiences are not enough, and are thus overrated). Why? Because it only exists as a formulation of the mind viewed through the five senses. Science has already proven that the object is really a mass of swirling particles, all changing at an exceedingly rapid rate of speed (vibration) which renders it incomprehensible — as if nonexistent. In short, a billionth of a second's existence is no existence at all. Get a life, particle! As Dalai Lama has said, there is the appearance tree (its wooden form); there is the real tree (its existence as a mass of particles); and then there is the Buddha Nature Tree, which is the indestructible and eternal essence of the tree — what the Vedic seer would call as an everlasting member of the Omkara Loka (The Word). That is the only place where one can truly meet the tree as it is. On all other levels you will only meet the appearance tree projected by the power of the mind — individual, collective, and cosmic. Even its solidity, so convincing to us as reality, is just a property of the mind. This is why most beings have the experience of

it all being a vast and passing dream, and why cogent philosophies have spoken of all this as being so.

The solution? Wake up and see everything as it really is...which will mean questioning, doubting, even denying what you experience with the senses entirely. The book, the tree, all objects, they are a part of Reality, as you have surmised. It is just that they cease to appear when the mind ceases functioning — like in deep sleep, nondual meditation, and samadhi. Even at death most beings go into a state of unknowing where worlds and objects disappear. Sentiency is the key to this conundrum, called pure Awareness. As the Svetasvatropanisad states, “Matter is perishable, but God is imperishable. The only Reality, God, rules over perishable matter and individual souls. By meditating upon that Reality there comes union, and a cessation to all illusion in the end.” And not content to leave it in the realm of faith and theism, Svetasvatara states further: “The conscious subject and the unconscious object, the master and the dependent — both are unborn. That force (Shakti/Divine Mother) who brings about their relationship is also unborn. When all three of these are realized as Brahman, the self becomes infinite, universal, and free from the sense of agency.” One can well see why Shankara defined Maya, this stultifying realm of appearances, as neither real, nor unreal, neither real and unreal, nor a combination of both! What is insentient cannot exist on its own, as there is no reality separate from Brahman. A second thing would render Reality relative! All has proceeded from the medium of the mind, the matrix of “creation,” and without that no worlds or objects would be possible. Contrary to popular opinion, Consciousness does not visit planets and bodies after they have formed over eons on their own steam. Prana, and the other forces and energies that construct and move elements for cohesion and gestation, have to have an origin as well. That origin is in the mind via the Atman. “From whence has this life force proceeded?” asks the Prasnopanisad. “From the Atman via an act of will of the mind.” But let us not fall into the error of immature philosophers who deem all that the mind produces to be empty, with no substance whatsoever. As the peace chant declares, rightly so: “From the Infinite the finite has come, and since it came from There, it too is infinite.” One cannot extract essence from an object and its experience, like one cannot get nutrition from a meal of cotton candy. But one can enjoy the sweetness if one realizes that it is as ephemeral as a fleeting taste on the tongue.

QUESTION #4: “I do not know anyone who calls in evil spirits. That, to me, is what I always thought of as occult. Now I have a different idea of the occult. There is a woman I know who can commune with the spirit world and peer into the future, and I have had 4 sessions with her in the past 30 years. I did not think of her as occult before, but I assume you would classify her ‘oracle’ work as occult and recommend avoiding sessions with her, right?”

BABAJI: If mediums and psychics — beings of that ilk — are authentic, then there is little harm in seeing them occasionally. However, a spiritual seeker ought to know that their art is one which operates on a very base level, spiritually speaking, and thus any answers which may come from it will also be basic — to be taken with a grain of salt. Moreover, deeper answers (to deeper questions) will arise from one's own inner contemplation as soon as the mind is able to master concentration and sit formally, making mediums and the like nothing short of unnecessary for spiritual aspirants.

And what I write above is the up side of the subject! The downside is that one is receiving information from a person who either has no purificatory practice going on, or whose practice is focused in on the level of physic prana only, devoid of crucial connections both anterior to and preceding that level. Fragments of knowledge, at best, may come, but will be missing the innate connections which make up a Sankhya teaching, a Yogic insight or a Vedantic realization. One may also stumble upon some real charlatans, and risk receiving knowledge that is not only mixed and questionable, but outright impure, being mingled in with some of the “unholy” spirits with which said medium or clairvoyant has been communing with. In my own experience I have had to intervene and actually help disassociate a few of my students from these types of influences using the mantra and the Divine Form as interceders on their behalf. Hauntings and possessions of the mind by unclean influences are not “spooky,” as in the movies, but may grab the mind's attentions and, at least, keep it worrying and distracted while, at worst, can turn it towards habitual nervousness and fragmentation. Types of mental illness begin here.

A student from New England writes:

COMMENTS: “The first thing that attracted my attention in Lesson 58 was your poignant statement, dear teacher, ‘Whenever I have come to an impasse, I have stopped and asked, then affirmed, that I love God.’ This is so indicative of your life, and most comforting. Sometimes I feel that I take Sri Ramakrishna's/Holy Mother's grace and love for granted. My emotions echo so well the first line of “Om Hring Ritang” (written by Swami Vivekananda himself, on Jai Ma Music, Puja Hymns): ‘You are to be adored. You are Truth unchanging. You are the Lord of the three gunas. In my weakness, I have neglected, O Remover of Delusion, to worship you earnestly and unceasingly; therefore, I claim refuge in Thee, O Friend of all Beings.’” Then, the hymn goes on to say that by chanting His Name we can be awakened from our delusion. How beautiful!

QUESTION #1: “I often use the term ‘Master’ to refer to Sri Ramakrishna, but in the Gospel he is quoted as saying he did not wish to be called by that term (as I understand, because he did not have an ego). Therefore, I sometimes feel uncertain about using it. Could you please comment?”

BABAJI: Even Holy Mother called Him Master at times. What else can one say? The thing is that He Himself could not rightly do so. He also did not vibrate well with the titles “father” and “guru.” Yes, His lack on any egoism is partly responsible for this. But whatever the case, and now well over a century after His passing, millions of beings are calling Him “Master,” and “The Great Master.” What to speak of centuries past, Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple, titled his book Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master. I think there is no harm in it, then, wouldn't you say?

QUESTION #2: “I appreciate the chart of ‘The Four Sensitivities.’ It is especially uplifting to contemplate the Soul's radiance. I have always found your lists/charts so helpful in organizing and highlighting the teachings. Before we move on to the next chapter, could you please explain the last part of Sutra 28: ‘...by the practice of the different parts of Yoga, the impurities being destroyed, knowledge becomes effulgent up to discrimination.’ With deepest appreciation as always for any comments and elucidations.”

BABAJI: That is, when initial practices (earlier limbs) in Yoga are accomplished, the impurities then being removed by these, one beholds the natural radiance of wisdom finally free of the veils of ignorance and follows that light to the Self — the original Mind (Mahat, Word, Purusha). From there a vision of the Atman is possible, and the actual merging into Brahman (Nirvikalpa Samadhi). Thus, discrimination, viveka, in all its stages and at every juncture of the spiritual path, is not just a Vedantic tool, but appears and is fixed in all the darshanas of India, each with its own take and emphasis on it.

A student from Pennsylvania writes:

QUESTION #1: “It has only been in the past couple of days that I've been able to understand something of the unreality of the mayic world in a way that is something other than merely academic. I have, all my life, been unconsciously believing that 1) I can ultimately and finally find fulfillment in the mayic world and, 2) that the mayic world can ultimately and finally harm me. In point of fact, seeing who and what I truly am as Atman, it can do neither, and ideas that it can are totally false. This insight has stripped away many of the projections that I was casting outward upon the mirror of life, projections involving fantasies of fulfillment or harm so that the world, more clearly than ever before, emerges in my perception as Brahman. Yet, I find myself wanting to take another, deeper step, so that I not only see the world as Brahman, but also respond to it, moment by moment, as an act of service to the Brahmic reality. I want to not only see life as holy, but I also want to engage it in an appropriately holy manner. The ‘how’ of how to do this eludes me, though. In the ‘old days,’ when I was a Krishna devotee with Iskcon, it was clear: one gathered flowers for the Deity in the temple room, or one washed the guru's dishes, and so forth. The connection of activity to Deity was, in other words, clear, leaving me with a constant and vivid sense of service to Ishvara. In the situation I'm in now, however, the matter is not so clear. In fact, it's not clear at all how actions like washing my clothes or filling out forms for government agencies can be service. In the manner of a karma yogin, I can be unconcerned about outcomes, and that is helpful, yet what I'm aiming at is still missing, and that is the sanctification of my day to day, indeed, moment to moment movement through the world. Even if I cannot directly turn all of my activities into service, how can I at least sanctify my way?”

BABAJI: Judging by what you have expressed here, I would say that it is time for you to do this “sanctification” in a more integrated way, in a way more comprehensive than guru seva alone — say, through what Gaudapada calls the “Nontouch Yoga.” This is described as the “activeless act of nonseparation of the Ultimate Truth and the relative truth.” That is, after deeper realizations begin to dawn due to yogic practices, the yogi continues to do all that he did previously, knowing fully that all is Brahman. As Gaudapada would say, “There is Absolute Consciousness.” It is Kevala Asti — It is Consciousness alone. This is not a matter of dispute between Shankarites and Ramanujans. It is not even a matter of Indian philosophy alone. It actually is where the investigation originates, where it exists — Exists. As Lex Hixon, SRV's founder, used to say, there are a vast number of different kinds of people from different walks of life and precisely different perspectives who verify this Absolute Truth together experientially all of the time, and they do this without relying on Iskcon, Christianity, Hinduism, or anything. They rely, knowingly or

not, on the nature of the Reality Itself, and the fact that they all are that Reality — that all and everything is that Reality.

There are two preeminent things which Gaudapada would add to his presentation of the disarming simplicity of pure Awareness. First, that It contains no “other” (is one without a second), and therefore has no opposite, no competition. Second, that It has three modes of expression. These he calls the three modes of relative awareness. Do not imagine that “twoness” or duality enters in here. Envision instead the mudra of perfection (sporting by Lord Buddha, for instance) which shows three fingers connected to the thumb, all curved into a connected circle. These demonstrate and symbolize the objective, the subjective, and the integrated (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states), plus Turiya, which is Absolute Consciousness symbolized by the empty circle. All of these supposedly different principles are contained in one gesture. To boot, the little finger flies independent. like the svara of AUM.

Along with the symbology and the philosophy, the main point is the nonseparation of the one Consciousness, even in and during the apparent separation of its manifold expressions. People can sense this uniqueness of Awareness without all the intellectual verbiage, but when sophistication comes to the practicing aspirant, an appropriate, if not ingenious, way of expressing it all comes to the fore, and delusion is suddenly struck down for all time. Then, as Gaudapada’s disciple, Shankara, states: “After observing the external and the internal, and rendering them into one indivisible state, meditate upon that State, pass your time contentedly, and be free.” May it ever be so.

QUESTION #2: “In repeated listening to your sets of talks, Axioms of Advaita, I have noted with considerable interest how Shankara created an Advaitic version of the eight steps of Patanjali’s yoga — for example, where the meditative *ekasana* is dealt with as a matter of being stabilized in Brahman. This is beautiful, especially since I have been working with the *asana* I use in meditation which has been insufficient and has been disturbing my ability to concentrate. I am writing to ask if you have you correlated, in any of your writings, the steps of Patanjali’s yoga with Shankara’s teaching on the same? Perhaps in a back issue of Nectar? Secondly, could you fill me in on the teaching about rolling the eyes down the bridge of the nose when concentrating in the Heart? I am also studying the nuances of the meditative *ekasana*, to pull the quality of this up, up, up... way up. Discomfort in my body and sloppy technique in general have been limiting how long I can sit and how well I can focus. Generally, though, all is going well, and I remain grateful, as always, to have found my way to you and to SRV.”

BABAJI: I note with satisfaction that you picked up on Shankara’s interpretation and expansion of Patanjali’s Yoga, which always interested me as well. And yes, I have written on and about it in issue #10 of Nectar of Nondual Truth, page 13, an article called Advaita Yoga — Patanjala as Revealed by Shankara. Please secure a copy of that from SRV offices and study it.

It has always been my contention that focusing on the tip of the nose was not only odd, and odd looking, but a misinterpretation of the real intent of concentration in meditation. Of course, if the occult power of the subtle sense of smell is desired, the hatha yogi may focus on the nose, I suppose. But gazing down the tip of the nose towards the heart, or focusing the attention on the heart chakra, is the purpose in Raja Yoga and meditation per say, which is also what Krishna speaks of in the Gita, i.e.,

"Fixing the attention in the heart, and the prana between the eyebrows, set your asana, neither too low nor too high, upon which to practice meditation, and then close all the gates of the body while uttering the monosyllable, AUM." The attention is to be placed on the heart chakra, as we see Swami Vivekananda doing in his fine meditation picture pose.

A student from Hawaii writes:

COMMENTS: "As I continue with the study of these illumined writings and your insightful explanations and clarifications I am feeling eternally blessed for this great gift. So much gratitude and appreciation I offer to you and this great tradition. In this reading, the Four Beneficial Attitudes are discussed. They seem so simple that it might be easy to dismiss them as something lacking great significance, yet after considering their impact I find that they are indeed profound. And in the context of the Seven Methods for Attaining Mastery of Consciousness, they are what stand out as the practice that speaks to me most. While all the rest have their merits, I find that these qualities develop in a daily and continuous way, an awareness that can really be transformative. As you point out in Vyasa's elucidation of these, one can see how to apply them as the situation arises. When one sees another who is happy, friendliness is a value that helps one see and share the divinity in that person. Seeing one who suffers, rather than ignoring them or failing to acknowledge their condition, one can offer empathy. The gladness that one would offer to a virtuous person might create a bond to inspire oneself to follow that example and rise to a higher level. And finally, rather than expressing judgment to one who is unrighteous, one can simply allow it to pass, without impugning anything malignant about them and allowing them to find their own way. I find that this kind of practice can really help in building an awareness that is less than periodic, as meditation can be, and of great value in rising to a higher awareness that is present always."

BABAJI: I am very glad to hear of this appreciation for the Four Beneficial Attitudes, which is a very simple way of practicing sadhana in everyday life. There are other practices, deeper and more profound, which could and should be undertaken, and the Four Attitudes have their own subtle shades of difficulty, to be sure. But people are always talking about a better world. Well, here is a way of achieving that which is not merely through social service, or via hoping and wishing, but which is active and conscious with spirituality at its base. It is wisdom (Jnana Yoga) acting through devotion (Bhakti Yoga) to achieve selfless action (Karma Yoga), and thus it is a comprehensive form of meditation (Raja Yoga). When there are simple yet powerful practices like this peppering the darshanas of Vedanta and Yoga, what excuse does the human being have for not practicing?

A student from Los Angeles writes:

QUESTION: "In the discussion on prana in Chapter 3, it is mentioned that, "The whole universe is composed of two materials, one of which they call Akasa. It is the omnipresent, all penetrating existence. Everything that has form, everything that is the result of compounds, is evolved out of this Akasa." Is this 'Akasa' the same as or related to the 'Akashic Record' which I have heard referred to many times, and which is, according to Wikipedia, "a Sanskrit phrase used to describe a compendium of mystical knowledge encoded in a non-physical plane of existence?" These records are described

as containing all knowledge of human experience and the history of the cosmos. They are metaphorically described as a vast internal library. Thank you for your time and great knowledge.”

BABAJI: Similar to words like karma, guru, and avatar, the Sanskrit word, akasha, has also undergone some serious misinterpretation and mistreatment from the secularly-minded materialistic West. However, the definitions you cite here are not far off the mark, are just incomplete, as all short descriptions of something that is beyond ordinary comprehension are bound to be.

Suffice to say here, in this short description of mine, that akasha is space, but that in Hindu cosmology based upon ancient Vedic insight and realization, space has some five levels to it. It is not just ether, as in one of the five elements. It is not only outer space either, which is only the external crust of the manifold, all-pervasive akasha. In fact, the study and knowledge of akasha will illumine the human mind by both informing it of esoteric wisdom and its hiding places, and by making connections to the realms within, what Jesus called “The kingdom of Heaven within” and “My Father’s mansion which holdeth many chambers.”

Why the arm moves, why the eye sees, why the ears hear, no one in the conventional, sense-bound, intellectually-oriented world has ever been able to sufficiently explain. Is it due to the energy from food? But “Man does not live by bread alone.” We must come to admit that there is prana, and then there is Consciousness. When the westerner speaks of time, space, and causation, he means linear time, physical space, and cause and effect restricted to planetary movement and physical bodies. But when the eastern seer speaks of these three, prana, akasha, and Cosmic Mind must be brought forward and accounted for.

And on the level of akasha, there is a space of objects (bhutakasha), a space of energy (pranakasha), a space of mind/thought (chittakasha), a space of wisdom (jnanakasha), and a space of Spirit (chidakasha). Among other important connections, these five explain where the transmigrating soul has gone after its so-called death. The five akashas listed above can be correlated to the realms of the human beings, the ancestors, the celestials, the luminaries, and Atman, respectively. Thus, a man does not die, nor does he go nowhere, into nothingness (though if he be ignorant he may go unconscious). He goes inward, where else? — based upon the level of akasha that he is headed for and accustomed to. For example, millions of souls are moving in and out of the realm of the ancestors (pranakasha) all of the time. Humans and their ancestors are exchanging places all the while. Does it not explain why whole nations and entire races are worshipping the ancestors? Such worship is not without due reciprocation. Where consciousness desires to go, there it will venture.

As for the akashic record, the idea here is that all vibrations must leave an effect. Just as powerful thoughts, positive and negative, leave an impression in the mind (samskara), so too will acts, deeds, and events leave “dents” in the akashas — great ones big dents, and small ones little dents. Most “psychics” are only able to read the physical akasha, called history, and maybe see a little into the pranakasha where the “departed” have gone. A Swami Vivekananda, as we know, or a Buddha, can see and commune with luminaries long gone from the physical fabric of this world. More can be said, but this little may suffice to generate interest. Read Yoga Vasishtha for more.

A student from Portland writes:

QUESTION: "In contemplating the teaching of pratyahara, I have been focusing on the fourfold mind. It seems that assigning one's level of consciousness will naturally change the quality of one's consciousness. My understanding of manas is that it is the level of the mind where duality and doubt come into play. I have been shifting my focus from manas to ahamkara, and even trying to experience the buddhi. It is hard to know, but all I can say is that the more I go inward with the fourfold mind, the more light I feel. I have actually experienced a shift in my reality, or at least how I am experiencing reality. Is this a kind of pratyahara? And here is a question: Doesn't one's consciousness need to be at the level of the buddhi to experience dharana? Can one experience it at the level of ahamkara? Can one overlay the fourfold mind with these levels of Yoga (i.e., pratyahara, dharana, and dhyana)? Is Samadhi at the level of Mahat or beyond? Can you expand on the fourfold mind, because I want to understand its qualities better in order to transcend it."

BABAJI: When we take apart any of the aspects of life and practice, whether it be the fourfold mind, the ingredients of the body, molecular structures, or even the various types of samadhi which Patanjali is teaching, we must remember that we are doing so only to provide a more complete analysis in order to benefit our understanding — or in other words, that these areas we are studying are not airtight compartments, and that they not only are essentially integrated, but overlap one another and interpenetrate each other as well.

With this in mind we can complete all of our exercises without meddling with the natural unity and integrity of any given system — such as singling out an atom and finding that it contains great power, then piercing it and using said power for destruction (later to find radiation raining down on our heads). The same can be said for the mind and its powers and aspects. Viewing them as an integrated whole first, then inspecting them to find out what is causing us to keep from seeing their innate unity, is acceptable....sometimes necessary. But when we do this, we should find the keynote which will not only benefit ourselves, but also will aid us in helping others, in bettering society, in raising children properly, and in conducting earthly matters with intelligence.

And all of this, rightly seen, correctly implemented, is concentration. Pratyahara, then, is only the natural disposition of the mind which values peace and contentment. It is less of a labor, even a practice, and more of a state of satisfied mental attention. That state is uniform, eurythmic — grateful and graceful, not contrary or averse. When the mind easily refrains from contact with the objects of the senses because it knows them to be insufficient for higher insight and realization, then dharana, even and uninterrupted concentration of mind, is already waxing full, offering its own rich array of benefits and rewards. Formal meditation under the auspices of this concentrated mind is devoid of obstacles, the likes of which novices and intermediates complain about constantly. What is wrong there? Can't they feel the Presence, peaceful and blissful, residing within? Why do they allow the fragmented mind to cheat them by, as Ramprasad sings, "bartering away the true gold of original Awareness at the center of their being for the cheap baubles and glass marbles of illusory existence?"

So, rather than "overlay" the fourfold mind over the limbs of Yoga, strive to perceive the limbs as natural concomitants of mind in general, as indigenous to the lands of Awareness Itself. We should know then, or come to know, that in true Yoga practice

we are not trying to chastise the mind, nor train it in some method that is alien to its nature and character. Our precious attention, granted to us by this selfsame mind, has fallen; that is all. It is now coming to rest upon undesirable, unhealthy, even unclean things — much like “a fly which lights on sweets one moment and filth the next.” This ignobility of the originally regal mind ought to be corrected as soon as possible, for not only will the superlative benefits of higher Mind be forfeited, but the countless ills and diseases of the fragmented mind will soon collect, leaving little room for peace and contentment, what to speak of realization and Yoga. As Ramprasad sings, “Oh Mind, what a petty Potentate you have become! Natural Sovereign of all the inner realms you created, you once upon a time listened to the counselors of higher wisdom who reside internally and eternally in your vast kingdom. But now you take the advice of mere courtiers, servants, and slaves, such as the rascal ego, the many fleeting thought-forms, and the five senses. You have become like a real black bee buzzing around false flowers woven into an immense tapestry.”

With encouragement from devotional wisdom seers, we press on to gain back some important ground which never should have been lost in the first place. And for that end we study, in perfect and synchronistic timing, the sutras pertinent to the final three limbs of Yoga.

Raja Yoga Sutra III: 1

deshah bandhah chittasya dharana (deshah, area, locale; bandhah, restriction; chittasya, thoughts of the mind; dharana, concentration).

“Concentration (the sixth limb of yoga) consists of directing the mind’s thoughts to one area, locale, or ideal.”

In the all-important arena of concentration, the seers advise beginners to focus on a physical object such as a candle flame or a stone obelisk. Swami Vivekananda notes that such as these are called pratikas or pratimas in India. The mind is truly an unstable fellow, and the least outer stimuli will cause variation in it, including undue vibration. The greater problem here is that once the mind gets called out, away from its center (Mahat, Ishvara, or Atman, depending on the quality of consciousness), it tends to stay out and soon forgets the safety, peace, bliss, and respite which is held eternally within it. In other words, the natural state for the human mind, until it gets enlightened fully, is not manas, but mahat. Attaching to, obsessing with, and fretting over objects is really beneath its station. With this higher perspective comprehended, we can possibly gain a glimpse of both how low mankind has fallen, and how frustrating this fall and its lack of correction is to the luminaries.

And correcting this downward plunge of the mind in maya is what the great souls are all about. This problem of the deviation of souls from peacefulness was on the mind of Lord Buddha when he tailor-made the Four Noble Truths some six centuries before the birth of Jesus. It became the Nazarene’s main preoccupation too some 500 years later when he witnessed the ignorant state of mind of both the common people and the intellectuals and religionists of his time. Some five or six centuries after that, Gaudapada and his lineage, attended by the spiritual phenomenon, Adishankaracharya, bent all

efforts and spent all energies towards alleviating the heavy and despondent minds of the people by trying to get them to consider nonduality and its superlative benefits. Another six or seven hundred years after Shankara, Lord Chaitanya came to sing, dance, and teach among the devotees, shedding the luster of Divine Love everywhere so as to lift the worldly mind up out of sloth and torpor. And it was certainly the case after another five hundred years had passed when Sri Ramakrishna was born on earth to help others snap the chains of this world and attain to samadhi.

Samadhi is the eighth and final limb of Patanjali's system. It is facilitated or brought into possibility by the sixth and seventh limbs of Yoga, which are represented here by the two sutras under inspection. This new chapter we are embarking on is called Vibhuti Pada. We ought to note that the vibhutis, or powers, which are brought into our possession by yogic practices are none other than concentration and meditation. The seers are not speaking of the occult powers here, or of any of the ordinary abilities of the mind at all. It is neither earthly genius nor the nominal knowledge of the worldly-wise which occupies our thoughts and aspirations here, but rare qualities seldom attained in this far-flung akasha (Bhutaskasha). Such is the value that great souls like Patanjali and Vedavyasa place on concentration and meditation, that they are given the highest rung-of-the-ladder status. Other practices previously prescribed have led up to the due consideration and careful evaluation of these twin powers, and there should be no falling off, or back, at this juncture for the sincere and resolved aspirant. It is only left to plunge in, armed with all that has been gleaned before, and reach the goal of human existence — Samadhi. There will be time enough for bliss and selfless works afterwards, for neither of these will ripen or exist uninterrupted without samadhi.

In our tradition there is a meditation called Tailadharadhyān, which refers to an unbroken flow of the mind's awareness towards the receptacle of Brahman. Literally, the phrase means the flow of oil from one container to another. This is the ideal, especially for the advanced practitioner, or the one who, having heard the teachings on Yoga and studied the sutras, is ready to put forth the most intense and persevering effort towards concentration and meditation. As Swami Vivekananda has stated in this regard, "The powers of the mind should be concentrated and turned back upon itself to penetrate its innermost secrets."

What are the powers of the mind? Concentration, meditation, and samadhi, leading to samyama. What are its innermost secrets? That all worlds, all things, all knowledge, exist within it, and that peace and realization are present for the taking when it realizes its identity with Brahman. And this is precisely why the mind should "turn its powers back upon itself." By inspection of the mind by the concentrated mind, the source of its powers can be traced. When this occurs, the realized yogi or yogini can switch off all powers at the source, entering into that state of formlessness which matches Atman/Brahman exactly. As the Japanese roshi said upon finding out this secret: "Supplies!" Surprisingly, then, the innermost secret of secrets that the mind has to reveal to us is that of "No-mind." Creation, creativity, projection, production, form, nature, energy, time, birth, heaven, earth, evolution, growth, enjoyment, manipulation, success, inspiration, antipathy, sankalpa, vikalpa, and all outward and inward moving things; and all the mass of reactions which proceed from these, such as destruction, boredom, withdrawal, disease, decay, death, hell, failure, depression, rage, war, the problem of survival, and endless cycles — enough of these! The great ones wanted out of such

contrasting sets of opposites, this melange of maya, and so they removed themselves from them and all that they infer by learning to switch off the multifarious machine of the mind once and for all (called Kaivalya in Yoga). As Swami Asehananda used to say, humorously, “No mind, no matter; no matter....never mind!” In other words, if one knows the innermost secret of mind, called no-mind, and knows to that Consciousness precedes the mind as vehicle, then no matter (physical or situational) will ever congeal — thus no forms, names, objects, and worlds. And if there is no matter, well, as the disinterested say, “never mind.” The entire affair requires no attention, is of no significance. The only significance then is “The Self is all in all, and none else exists, and ‘Thou Art That.’”

Raja Yoga Sutra III: 2

tatra pratyaya ekatanata dhyanam (tatra, within that space; pratyaya, effort at focus; ekatanata, constant single-mindedness; dhyanam, meditation).

“Within that blissful space of focused thoughts occurs the single-minded state of meditation.”

Continuing on in the vein of the writings above, we perceive the concept of one-pointed mind, endear ourselves to it naturally, and then begin to practice holding the mind in that singular mode for longer and longer periods of time. This process will manifest differently for various practitioners, but the important and pivotal stage of concentration has been gained, so all that is left to do is to sit regularly — to “do” nothing. There is not even any more “emptying of the mind,” just as there is no more need to empty and fill the lungs. Why remain at lower stages of practice when attainment has already taken place? Does a high school graduate go back to grade school? Now! The superlative moment of meditation is upon you. Sink yourself deep into that moment and take in the silence of Peace, Shanti — “a Peace which passeth all understanding.” There is nothing left to do. All deeds will do themselves; all work will work itself; all thought will resolve itself; the world will take care of itself. It always has. As Tibetan Buddha dharma has it:

- Good deeds and misdeeds naturally meet with rewards and remedies, so the one-pointed mind remains undisturbed.
- Work is the realm of phenomena, and all phenomena are simultaneously empty and luminous, so the one-pointed mind meditates spontaneously in the manner of non-doing and non-effort.
- The nascent universe is thought itself, objects are mind made manifest, and all misconceptions and errant thoughts are liberated in formless Awareness, so the one-pointed mind meditates in the shining realm of its own illumination, which can never be disturbed, touched, or conceived.

Study, practice, and meditate aspiring yogis and yoginis. Samadhi is yet to come.....in the sutras and in your Self.

Shanti, Shanti, Shantih — Om Peace, Peace, Peace.