

# The Undeciphered Text: Anomalies, Problems and Paradoxes in the Yogasūtra<sup>1</sup>

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The Yogasūtra is a venerable text of the Indian tradition, the foundation for yogic practices that are supposed to culminate in samādhi<sup>2</sup>, the nirvikalpa-samādhi<sup>3</sup>, which is the parama-puruṣārtha<sup>4</sup> for most Indians, as it is considered to be identical with mokṣa<sup>5</sup> which they all seek, or ought to seek. Yet, the sequence of chapters in this text seem, at least prima facie, to raise a problem as it ends with kaivalya which has to be different from samādhi as it has already disposed it off in the first chapter with which it begins, and is 'named' after it. 'Samādhi-pāda' is the first adhyāya<sup>6</sup> of this short sūtra text, the shortest amongst the sūtra texts dealing with

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<sup>2</sup> samādhi - the ultimate meditative state

<sup>3</sup> nirvikalpa-samādhi - samādhi which altogether excludes mental activity; Patañjali does not use this term, but instead speaks of nirbīja (objectless) samādhi

<sup>4</sup> parama-puruṣārtha - highest human goal or human ideal

<sup>5</sup> mokṣa - freedom (from the mundane realm and the 'mundane I')

<sup>6</sup> adhyāya - chapter

Indian philosophy, followed by other chapters called Sādhana-pāda, Vibhūti-pāda and Kaivalya-pāda<sup>7</sup>.

The text seems to be, self-consciously, a prayoga-śāstra<sup>8</sup>, not interested in theoretical discussions or refutations of a pūrva-pakṣa<sup>9</sup>, except incidentally. It is an anuśāsana grantha<sup>10</sup>, as it proclaims in the first sūtra. But, strangely, yoga is not defined positively, but only negatively as citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ (YS 1.2)<sup>11</sup>. The vṛtti-s<sup>12</sup> are given as consisting of pramāṇa, viparyaya, vikalpa, smṛti and nidrā<sup>13</sup>, and supposed to be kliṣṭa and akliṣṭa<sup>14</sup> in nature. Their complete nirodha<sup>15</sup> is supposed to result in the attainment by the self of its 'true' nature and its 'establishment' in it permanently.

There is, presumably, no difference between kliṣṭa and akliṣṭa vṛtti-s in this regard, as vṛtti per se is supposed to stand in the way of 'realizing' one's 'true' nature. But if so, the only thing that could, or should, escape this far-reaching, comprehensive and

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<sup>7</sup> The chapters (pāda-s) on meditation (samādhi), praxis (sādhana), powers (vibhūti) and aloneness/freedom (kaivalya)

<sup>8</sup> prayoga-śāstra - practical guide, experiential text

<sup>9</sup> pūrva-pakṣa - counter-perspectives, other philosophical positions

<sup>10</sup> anuśāsana grantha - handbook, practical guide

<sup>11</sup> cessation of mental activity

<sup>12</sup> vṛtti-s - mind movements, mental activity

<sup>13</sup> pramāṇa, viparyaya, vikalpa, smṛti and nidrā - valid knowledge, invalid knowledge, verbal construction, sleep and memory.

<sup>14</sup> kliṣṭa and akliṣṭa - afflictive and non-afflictive

<sup>15</sup> nirodha- cessation, stoppage, extinction

universal category called *vṛtti*, or what may be called the 'natural forms' that the *citta*<sup>16</sup> usually takes, is the force or power or *śakti* that can effectuate their total stoppage, or even permanent extinction. The power of *nirodha* or *nirodha-śakti* has to be there, but the *Yogasūtra* does not seem to have any discussion on this, or even realize the implications of this for its ideal of realizing *kaivalya*<sup>17</sup>, which it undermines in a fundamental way. The *kevalin*<sup>18</sup>, in case the *Sāṃkhya* framework is accepted for *Yoga*, cannot be a *kartā*<sup>19</sup> or a *bhoktā*<sup>20</sup>, but only a *draṣṭā*<sup>21</sup>, and hence cannot do anything, or have any power.

Strangely, and paradoxically, the *Yogasūtra* does talk of *siddhi-s*<sup>22</sup>, and in fact, has a whole chapter on it. The third *adhyāya* is devoted to it, without the author asking how these could possibly be there, if *citta-vṛtti nirodha* has already been achieved. The *siddhi-s*, certainly, cannot be there without the *vṛtti-s* and, if so, their occurrence is a sure sign that one is not practicing *yoga*, or even trying to realize it, but doing something else.

The problem that the whole notion of *siddhi* raises for the basic and foundational notion of *vṛtti* has not

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<sup>16</sup> *citta* - consciousness, mind, the thinking faculty

<sup>17</sup> *kaivalya* - aloneness/freedom; the final goal of *Pātañjala-yoga*

<sup>18</sup> *kevalin* - a yogin who has attained *kaivalya*

<sup>19</sup> *kartā* - agent, doer

<sup>20</sup> *bhoktā* - one who enjoys the fruits of his actions

<sup>21</sup> *draṣṭā* - detached observer or witness

<sup>22</sup> *siddhi-s* - powers

been seen by the writers on this text. The vṛtti-s are enumerated in sūtra 1.6, and it will be difficult to accommodate the siddhi-s in it. The list of vṛtti-s seems to concentrate more on 'knowledge' than the 'active' or 'volitional' powers of consciousness. The siddhi-s, perhaps, try to rectify this, but without leading to a 'unified' picture, as the 'svarūpa'<sup>23</sup> to which one has to return and in which one has to be steadfastly established, is that of one who only 'knows' and cannot do anything.

The deep division and dichotomy between 'knowledge' and 'action' lies at the heart of India's philosophical thought, and the Yogasūtra only confirms it. A clear analysis of the notion of vṛtti might perhaps have saved the situation. What exactly is a vṛtti, and 'how' does it 'arise' and 'cease', and 'why' does it happen to be so? The term, it should be remembered, is 'neutral', though the author of the Yogasūtra does not treat it to be so. Nivṛtti<sup>24</sup> is supposed to be a vṛtti as much as pravṛtti<sup>25</sup>; only the direction of the former is different, as the well-known Upaniṣadic saying prāñci khāni vyatṛṇat

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<sup>23</sup> svarūpa - the 'original essence' of the human person, which according to Patañjali precedes any worldly identification (sarūpya).

<sup>24</sup> nivṛtti - ingoing, reversal movement of consciousness, away from objects, away from the world

<sup>25</sup> pravṛtti - object-centered, intentional, outgoing movement of consciousness

svayaṃbhūḥ, tasmāt parāṅ paśyati nāntarātman<sup>26</sup> attests. But why the outgoing movement of consciousness should be regarded as something 'undesirable' in itself, or the 'inward' movement intrinsically desirable, has remained the 'unasked' question in the Indian tradition. Even such a supposedly 'common sense' tradition as the Nyāya equated pravṛtti with doṣa<sup>27</sup> in Nyāyasūtra 1.1.2, without giving any reasons for doing so<sup>28</sup>. Pravṛtti per se cannot be good or bad; nor can nivṛtti be so. The differentiation between good and bad cuts across the pravṛtti/nivṛtti distinction, as the Gītā and the Yogavāsiṣṭha try to say in their different ways.

The question, then, is what makes a vṛtti, whether outward or inward, good or bad and, at a deeper level, what are these two movements of consciousness, and whether one obstructs the other, or the pursuit of one excludes the pursuit of the other. Perhaps, the notions of sāmāthyā<sup>29</sup> and svātantrya<sup>30</sup> which are already there in the tradition might help in the

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<sup>26</sup> The self-existent (svayaṃbhū) pierced the openings outward; therefore one looks outward, and does not see the inner self (antarātman) (Kaṭha Upaniṣad 2.1.1)

<sup>27</sup> doṣa - defect, weakness

<sup>28</sup> Nyāyasūtra 1.1.2: duḥkha-janma-pravṛtti-doṣa-mithyā-jñānānām uttarottarāpāye tad-anantarāpāyād apavargaḥ

Suffering (duḥkha), birth (janma), outgoing movement of consciousness (pravṛtti), faults (doṣa) and misapprehension (mithyā-jñānānām) - on the successive annihilation of these in the reverse order, there follows release (apavarga).

<sup>29</sup> sāmāthyā - power

<sup>30</sup> svātantrya - freedom

matter. There is the idea of pravṛtti-sāmarthya<sup>31</sup> and though the complementary idea of nivṛtti-sāmarthya<sup>32</sup> is not there, it can easily be added, particularly if one takes the notion of siddhi seriously, not in the specific form which it takes in the Yogasūtra, but generally. In fact, the idea of svātantrya or 'freedom' may provide the other 'directional center' to that of siddhi or 'power' which is contained in the notion of sāmarthya. The idea of svātantrya, that is, of 'sva-tantra', means 'being determined by the self' or not losing one's 'freedom' because of anything internal or external to oneself. The so-called 'tantra' that one 'weaves' or 'creates' for oneself by oneself, can be 'sva' only if one is 'free' in respect to it, that is, not 'bound' by it in the sense of an 'obsessive compulsion'<sup>33</sup>.

The vṛtti-s, then, will be seen differently, and so also the idea of nirodha, the two notions that are central to the Yogasūtra. The pravṛtti-sāmarthya would lead to abhyudaya<sup>34</sup>, and the nivṛtti-sāmarthya to siddhi in the generalized sense of development of the 'internal' powers of the mind. 'Nirodha', or the

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<sup>31</sup> pravṛtti-sāmarthya - the power of extroversion, of involvement in the world, of intentionality

<sup>32</sup> nivṛtti-sāmarthya - the power of introversion, of disengagement, of self-sufficiency

<sup>33</sup> DK plays with the components of the compound svatantra (independence, freedom), namely tantra (literally thread) and sva (self). Through this etymological play, he suggests that even the notion of freedom can become bondage, or that one has to be free even with regard to freedom.

<sup>34</sup> abhyudaya - prosperity, attainment of the good

ability to stop the vṛtti-s of either kind, would result in one's re-establishment at the self-consciousness level, in that primordial and foundational freedom or 'svātantrya', which was once at the level of consciousness, and on which both the pravṛtti and the nivṛtti sāmānyā-s are founded. The distinction between kliṣṭa and akliṣṭa vṛtti-s would, then, depend on whether they make one 'free' to pursue both pravṛtti and nivṛtti depending on the situation, or not. Not to be able to pursue nivṛtti would be as much a sign of bondage as not to be able to pursue pravṛtti. The mention of maitrī, karuṇā, muditā and upekṣa<sup>35</sup>, the well known śīla<sup>36</sup> in Buddhism in sūtra 1.33, and of yama and niyama<sup>37</sup> in sutra 2.30 and 2.32 are evidence of this.

The author of the Yogasūtra could, obviously, not have meant the 'nirodha' of all these through the practice of yoga, though large parts of the tradition have interpreted him this way. It is true that kaivalya as the end of yoga propounded in the last chapter of the Yogasūtra seems to support the traditional interpretation. Both the Sāṃkhya and the Advaita Vedānta traditions face the very same dilemma, as their analysis lands them in the paradoxical situation where the attainment of 'freedom' results in the total

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<sup>35</sup> maitrī, karuṇā, muditā and upekṣa - friendliness, compassion, joy and equanimity. DK returns to the four bramavihāra-s or 'sublime attitudes' below.

<sup>36</sup> śīla - morality, ethical foundation

<sup>37</sup> yama and niyama - primary and secondary ethical guidelines

loss of freedom, as one becomes intrinsically incapable of 'exercising' any freedom at all. One has voluntarily given up the 'freedom to return' and one is left with one's own 'aloneness' with no possibility of 'relating' to anything whatsoever.

The 'svarūpa' in which one has to be established through yoga, then, has to be different from 'kaivalya', or even from 'saccidānanda'<sup>38</sup>, as the Advaitins<sup>39</sup> generally tend to describe the svarūpa of the ātman<sup>40</sup>. There must be the possibility of action, enlightened action, emanating from that 'free' and 'enlightened' consciousness that the process of yoga is supposed to 'unveil' or 'bring into being' or achieve through a subtle, gradual transformation of consciousness that slowly changes it in all its aspects and all its levels, including those of 'knowing', 'feeling' and 'willing'. The Gītā has called it 'karma kauśala' in its well known definition of yoga as yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam<sup>41</sup>. The Buddhists had

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<sup>38</sup> saccidānanda - being (sat), consciousness (cit), bliss (ānanda) - is an idiom used by Advaitin-s to designate the ātman. Eliot Deutsch (1969, p. 9) explains that 'these are not so much qualifying attributes of the ātman, as they are the terms that express the apprehension of the ātman by the human person'.

<sup>39</sup> Advaitin - adherent of the Advaita-vedānta school of thought

<sup>40</sup> ātman - a tentative notion denoting that which cannot be expressed through language. The notion of ātman, roughly speaking, refers to one's inner, eternal, metaphysical selfhood, above and beyond one's phenomenal, worldly aspects.

<sup>41</sup> yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam (Bhagavadgītā 2.50) - 'Yoga is proficiency in (and not the abandonment of) action'.



called this prajñā<sup>42</sup>, which is supposed to arise, like kaivalya, after samādhi in the sequence of śīla, samādhi and prajñā. It should be remembered that it is this prajñā which leads to the idea of pāramitā<sup>43</sup> on the one hand and the ideal of the bodhisattva<sup>44</sup>, on the other. There is also the notion of sahaja<sup>45</sup> in the Indian tradition and that of 'Holy Will', as in Kant, in the Western tradition.

The Gītā's long meditation and reflection on 'action' has not been seen in the way it deserves. The Vedāntic

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<sup>42</sup> prajñā - wisdom; a Buddhist notion, which in DK's reading is not divorced from action.

<sup>43</sup> pāramitā - 'perfection' or 'completeness'; Mahāyāna Buddhism specifies six 'perfections' to be achieved by the spiritual aspirant, namely perfection in dāna (generosity), śīla (morality), kṣānti (tolerance), vīrya (effort), dhyāna (meditation) and prajñā (wisdom). DK's point is that sādhana, a 'spiritual path', need not necessarily culminate in introversion and disengagement as the Sāṃkhyan notion of kaivalya adopted by Patañjali seems to suggest; but quite the opposite, in what he himself refers to as 'enlightened action'. The Buddhist notion of pāramitā is brought here as an illustration of such an approach.

<sup>44</sup> bodhisattva - a person motivated by compassion, who acts for the 'collective liberation' of every sentient being; in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the ideal of the bodhisattva replaces the older, 'negative' ideal of nirvāṇa. The notion of the bodhisattva is for DK, another illustration of 'engaged spirituality'.

<sup>45</sup> sahaja - a term which indicates, in DK's present use, an action performed spontaneously, naturally, of its own.

ācārya-s<sup>46</sup> were not interested in it. Tilak, Gandhi, Aurobindo and Vinoba have tried to fill this gap in their different ways in modern times. But they have not seen it in the context of the Sāṃkhyan and the Advaitic analysis of the action-centric consciousness, and the problems and the bondages it creates, for the avoidance of which at the most fundamental level the elaborate praxis prescribed in the Yogasūtra was formulated, and in the context of which the Gītā was written.

The Gītā's own formulations were preceded by the long tradition of thinking on this in the Abhidhamma literature of the Buddhists. There, the same problem is formulated and analyzed in terms of the 'embodied' being who is a saṃghāṭa<sup>47</sup> of the body, with its five senses and the sense of 'bodily feeling', the mind with its insatiable desire, the intellect with its perennial questioning, reason with its eternal seeking for unity and truth, and a hundred other things that this vast literature composed over centuries contains.

The Gītā, strangely, not only talks of 'karma kauśala' in the context of yoga, but also of 'samatva' when it says samatvaṃ yoga ucyate<sup>48</sup>. Samatva suggests the equal

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<sup>46</sup> The Vedāntic ācāryas - the guru-s or teachers of the Vedānta tradition; implied is critique of Śaṅkara's knowledge-entered reading of the action-centered Bhagavadgītā.

<sup>47</sup> saṃghāṭa - conglomeration

<sup>48</sup> samatvaṃ yoga ucyate (Bhagavadgītā 2.48)- 'yoga is sameness', or 'evenness'.

regard for all that is worth striving for in all realms, and explains, to some extent, the Gītā's 'equal' emphasis on knowledge, action and feeling, or jñāna, karma and bhakti as they are known in the tradition. There has always been the problem of 'reconciling' these diverse and conflicting directions in the statements of the text. However, the problem arises only because these statements are not seen in the context of the comprehensive and all-embracing puruṣārtha<sup>49</sup> theory that takes into account all the different aspects and dimensions of man as embodied self-conscious being among other such beings, which a human being is.

The Gītā and the Abhidhamma are hesitating steps in this direction, and an adequate theory of puruṣārtha is yet to be developed, as the usual four puruṣārtha-s<sup>50</sup> mentioned in the tradition do not accommodate all that is worthwhile for human seeking even as we know it at present. Both the Abhidhamma and the Gītā, however, in their different ways, accept pravṛtti and do not consider it per se as 'sinful' or 'wrong' as

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<sup>49</sup> puruṣārtha - worthy human goals, which the human person should strive to accomplish.

<sup>50</sup> The usual four puruṣārtha-s enumerated by the tradition are dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa - the ritualistic or 'religious' aspect of one's life; livelihood; one's erotic dimension or family life; and finally, freedom in the sense of transcending one's phenomenal aspects, including the three previous human goals. For a detailed philosophical analysis of the puruṣārtha theory, with its (at least prima facie) inner contradiction, see DK's article 'The Myth of the Puruṣārtha-s', in Daya Krishna (2006a), pp. 381-406

the Yogasūtra and even the Nyāyasūtra appear to conceive it to be. The Gītā, however, is aware of the socio-political dimension of action, which the Abhidhamma seems to lack. The puruṣārtha theory in its traditional formulation focuses on dharma, but shows little awareness of the distinction between 'public' and 'private' or 'individual' and 'social', or between 'social' and 'political'. These distinctions have always created dilemmas for any theory of action, as it is evident at a hundred places in the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, so well known to everybody, except to those who talk and write about dharma in the tradition.

In fact, the traditional theory of puruṣārtha fails to take note even of the vṛtti-s in pravṛtti, as it confines them to artha and kāma only, as if these were the only things that man seeks, or should seek, in the realm of pravṛtti. Strangely, the vṛtti-s that are there in nivṛtti have not even been thought of, except in a purely negative way, even though the Yogasūtra talks of dhāraṇā, dhyāna and siddhi<sup>51</sup>, explicitly enumerating the last as many in number and, presumably, as the result of different modes of

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<sup>51</sup> dhāraṇā, dhyāna and siddhi - dhāraṇā and dhyāna are the first two meditative stages in Patañjali's formulation. DK does not mention the third and final meditative stage, namely samādhi, since it is 'purely negative' and he is in search of diversity and multiplicity within nivṛtti. The siddhi-s are yogic powers attained through saṃyama or yogic meditation. Daya Krishna, then, wants to read dhāraṇā, dhyāna and siddhi as different vṛtti-s included within nivṛtti.

dhāraṇā and dhyāna. Pratyāhāra<sup>52</sup> is the negative movement of which dhāraṇā and dhyāna have to be seen as positive aspects. Both, as the tradition well knows, are, like kāma<sup>53</sup>, intrinsically neutral as one may concentrate on anything and meditate on it, just as one may 'desire' anything.

The acts of 'withdrawal' and 'concentration' are known to everybody in non-spiritual contexts, suggesting that they are 'normal' powers of the mind akin to 'attending', 'intending' and 'willing' that are used in other contexts. These, then, may reasonably be regarded as the vṛtti-s of nivṛtti, since they follow pratyāhāra which is only another name for nivṛtti, or at least the first stage of it.

*Citta-vṛtti nirodha*, if complete, has to be a nirodha of all the vṛtti-s, no matter whether they belong to pravṛtti or nivṛtti, and thus must include dhāraṇā and dhyāna, and even pratyāhāra, as the latter is the first vṛtti arising in nivṛtti. Samādhi, then, would be only another name for the nirodha of both dhāraṇā and dhyāna, and would thus be only nirvikalpa, and never savikalpaka<sup>54</sup> in character. And if it is nirvikalpaka, one would not 'know' what one's 'svarūpa' is, as there could not be any vṛtti there,

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<sup>52</sup> pratyāhāra - withdrawal of the senses

<sup>53</sup> kāma - desire

<sup>54</sup> nirvikalpa and savikalpaka samādhi - meditative states which exclude and include mental activity, respectively.

and at a deeper level, nothing to know as there is neither 'sva' nor 'rūpa' there<sup>55</sup>.

The 'vṛtti-nirodha', then, has to be understood in a different way. It can only mean the capacity of nirodha in respect of any vṛtti whatsoever, and not the 'actuality' of it in the sense that there is no vṛtti at all, or that even the possibility of any vṛtti arising has been abolished forever. Yoga would, then, mean the development of this capacity so that one can 'free' oneself from the 'bondage' of any vṛtti, whatever be its nature.

But, then, how shall we conceive of samādhi which is so central to yoga, as understood in the Indian

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<sup>55</sup> DK points out what he sees as a contradiction within Patañjali's formulation. In YS 1.3 the Sūtra-kāra speaks of nirodha (cessation of mental activity) as revealing one's svarūpa or 'original essence' as puruṣa, as uninvolved 'witness'. In YS 1.51 he speaks of objectless meditation (nirbīja samādhi, referred to by DK as nirvikalpa samādhi) as sarva-nirodha or 'cessation of everything'. It is implied (and reinforced in Vyāsa's bhāṣya) that nirodha and (nirbīja) samadhi are one and the same. In this extreme meditative state, DK observes and plays with the compound svarūpa, there is neither 'sva' nor 'rūpa', neither 'me' (subject) nor 'forms' (objects), and therefore no 'knowledge' whatsoever, including 'knowledge' of one's own svarūpa. As I tried to show in chapter 3, Patañjali walks on thin ice in his attempt to 'knowledgify' the yogic experience. DK rejects this attempt, as well as nirbīja (or nirvikalpa) samādhi as an instance of freedom. For him, knowledge cannot be regarded as knowledge without a knowing subject, and freedom cannot be regarded as freedom if one cannot know that one is free and do something with his freedom.

tradition, and as described in the Yogasūtra? Samādhi is said to be the state where the formation of vṛtti-s has been stopped by an 'act' of consciousness resulting from a 'resolve' on the part of self-consciousness to 'do' so. It is a reflexive activity of self-consciousness directed at consciousness itself, with the 'intent' that the 'movement' in it caused by 'external' or 'internal' factors cease altogether, so that it be 'stilled' and become 'itself', and be at 'peace' with itself.

But this is not the end of the matter, and cannot be so in principle, for a human being who strives for samādhi and attains it continues to be a human being with body, mind, memory, intellect and the senses, and has to wake up and 'return' to all these with their vṛtti-s, even if they have been reduced to the minimum possible extent by the process of yoga which he had undertaken. In fact, the body continues to function in the state of samādhi, as it is still 'alive' and not 'dead', and needs all that is necessary to sustain and keep it alive. The 'waking' and the 'return' make one acutely aware of this, and 'force' on oneself the recognition that 'things' are as they were before and that nothing has changed much during the time when one had stopped the vṛtti-s, except that one was not aware of that which one becomes aware of through them.

The tradition encountered this problem in the discussion centering round the question whether mukti<sup>56</sup> is possible while 'living' or one has to 'die', at least bodily, in order to attain it. Jīvan-mukti and

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<sup>56</sup> mukti - freedom

videha-mukti<sup>57</sup> are the names of these in the tradition, but the problem arises only because the terms 'jīvana' or 'videha' have not been paid serious attention to by the thinkers concerned, as well as the relation between mukti and samādhi, which for some strange reason have been considered identical.

Samādhi may be considered as mukti from the vṛtti-s in the framework of the Yogasūtra, and if its five-fold enumeration of them is to be taken seriously, then *only* from them. The assumption that every possible vṛtti can be classified under these five, and five heads alone, seems at least prima facie, questionable. It is not clear, for example, if the author of the Yogasūtra would classify yama and niyama amongst the vṛtti-s. It would be a disaster if it were to be so, as instead of cultivating them one would have to try to stop them. In fact, the dilemma would extend to every sādhana enumerated in the second chapter. It would have to be treated as a vṛtti if it is sādhana or means to something else, and in case it is treated as such, one would have to try to stop it. In a sense, the notion of samādhi seems to mean just this, at least when it is treated as nirvikalpa in nature. Dhyāna, if it is a dhyāna, has to be savikalpa, as it is a deep and exclusive concentration on that which one had chosen as an 'object' of concentration in

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<sup>57</sup> jīvan-mukti and videha-mukti - 'freedom in this life' and 'bodiless freedom' or 'freedom after death' respectively



dhāraṇā. The nirvikalpa samādhi would then have to be a nirodha of this also.

But can there possibly ever be a nirodha of that which has been described by the terms āsana and prāṇāyāma in the aṣṭāṅga-yoga<sup>58</sup> of the Yogasūtra? One will, perforce, continue to be 'sitting' in the āsana perfected by one and 'breathe' in a way that does not disturb the samādhi. Āsana and Prāṇāyāma have to continue to be there, as without them, there would be no samādhi, at least as we 'know' it at the human level and as it is treated in the Yogasūtra. But just as the 'living body' is there, very much there, 'helping' one to be in a state of samādhi, so is the air one breathes, the earth on which one sits and all the rest which supports the earth and the air in the universe. It is thus the universe as a whole which sustains and supports the state of samādhi, even though it may create the illusion that it is not so. The 'return' from samādhi shatters the illusion as one finds that everything is there as before. There is the body with all its senses, and the mind and the intellect and the world - just as when one wakes up from sleep. One may return to samādhi, just as one does to sleep. The latter is, of course, natural and normal to all living beings, while the former is a rare achievement, if it is ever achieved by any human being in the fullest and most complete sense of the term. The 'return', thus, is as 'real' as the

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<sup>58</sup> āsana, prāṇāyāma, aṣṭāṅga-yoga - yogic posture, breath control and Patañjali's eightfold yoga scheme

'withdrawal' was, and each stage in the two journeys is as 'real' as all the others. Somehow, for some reason, the Indian tradition devalued all that is included under the term pravṛtti and believed there is a no 'return' from nirvikalpa samādhi, as it is the same as mokṣa, that is, the 'final' stage from which there is no 'return' to the bondage of 'life' and 'death'. The fact that one is an 'embodied' being, who is 'alive' in the ordinary biological sense of the term, should be sufficient to question this identification.

For the author of the Yogasūtra, it is kaivalya that is the final stage and, presumably, either identical with samādhi or the result of it. But in either case, it can have no relation, positive or negative, with any object whatsoever. The puruṣa is supposed to be neither a kartā nor a bhoktā, and hence can obviously not act to avoid hiṃsā<sup>59</sup>, or falsity or the desire for 'possessing' what is somebody else's, or the desire for a relationship with the opposite sex, not to talk of 'friendliness', 'compassion', 'joyfulness' and 'ignoring' or 'underplaying' imperfections and defects in others, mentioned in sūtra 1.33<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> hiṃsā - violence

<sup>60</sup> Yogasūtra 1.33: Through the practice of friendliness (maitrī), compassion (karuṇā), joy (muditā) and equanimity (upekṣa) toward the happy, the suffering, the virtuous and the unvirtuous (respectively), the consciousness is clarified (maitrī-karuṇā-muditā-upekṣāṇām sukha-duḥkha-puṇya-apuṇya-viṣayāṇām bhāvanātaś citta-prasādanam). DK refers to muditā as joyfulness and explicates the

Samādhi, however, may not be seen as leading to kaivalya where, at least in the Sāṃkhyan perspective, puruṣa is supposed to be a pure dṛṣṭā, but rather to an 'object-less' state of consciousness which is only another name for it, as in the Advaita Vedānta. Here even the possibility of 'relationship' is negated, and if Śaṅkara's view as propounded in his bhāṣya<sup>61</sup> on the Taittirīya-Upaniṣad is to be believed, even ānanda<sup>62</sup> cannot be ascribed to it.

The trouble with all this is that it wants to see samādhi as the state of mokṣa, which the whole spiritual and cultural tradition of India has aspired for in the belief that it gives one final release from the bondage of birth and death. But as 'death' is inevitable whether one has attained samādhi or not, and as the possible actualization of the state is writ large on the traditions of Yoga in India, it has to be conceived and understood in a different way. Samādhi, as the Yogasūtra attests, is logically and experientially the last and final stage in the process of withdrawal of consciousness from all 'externality', and reveals the 'freedom' that it has to 'withdraw' from all relationships, if it chooses to do so. But it does not take away from it its 'freedom' to 'relate' or 'return' to the world at any level of body or mind or intellect or value or imagination, or to be with a

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notion of upekṣa as 'ignoring or underplaying imperfections and defects in others'.

<sup>61</sup> bhāṣya - commentary

<sup>62</sup> ānanda - 'bliss', a term used in the Vedānta tradition to depict the undepictable 'feeling' of realizing one's 'ātmanhood', or in Sāṃkhya-yoga terms, 'puruṣahood'.

consciousness and self-consciousness other than itself.

The Yogasūtra is a prayoga-śāstra, an anuśāsana for all human beings not to become self-enclosed, self-sufficient, isolated spiritual beings, imprisoned in their own selves, 'unfree' to get out of that state and relate even to other kevalin-s<sup>63</sup> who are in the same predicament. The text, it is true, ends with the Kaivalya-pāda, but it does not ask what shall be the relation between these kevalin-s. The Jain-s, who also have this notion of a plurality of kevalin-s, have not asked the question either. Samādhi, thus, instead of making one 'free', has resulted in the total loss of 'freedom' where one becomes totally incapable of 'doing' anything, let alone 'helping' others on the path to yoga or anything else. Surely, the author of the Yogasūtra could not have meant this, even if he does seem to say this on a prima facie view of things. The very fact that he wrote the text to show 'others' the path to yoga proves this. The 'suffering' humanity has been at the center of the spiritual consciousness, and the masters have always 'returned' from the 'withdrawal' as the Buddha is said to have done long ago, and also so many others in the history of humanity.

But once one accepts the idea of 'return' after the 'withdrawal' into samādhi, one also accepts the

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<sup>63</sup> Kevalin - a yogin who has achieved kaivalya

'reality' of that to which one returns. The implications of this 'acceptance' are so enormous, that they would undermine the very foundations on the basis of which the edifice of Indian spirituality has been built. The denial of the 'reality' of the world as 'known' by the senses and by reason is writ large on the Indian tradition. The recourse to the notions of māyā or līlā<sup>64</sup> would be of no avail, nor for that matter, the distinction between vyavahāra and paramārtha<sup>65</sup>, which is so fashionable amongst the Advaitins who try to evade the basic contradiction involved in it, leading to 'dishonesty' in thought and action<sup>66</sup>.

But if one accepts the possibility of samādhi and also of the 'return' from it, one would have to ask the crucial question: How does the attainment of the former affect the latter? One's vyavahāra cannot

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<sup>64</sup> māyā and līlā - notions pertaining to the phenomenal aspects of the human person (including not just the world 'out there' or one's biological aspect, but even one's mental faculty and psychological substratum) as 'illusion' (māyā) or 'play' (līlā). The two notions, in their initial Advaitic formulation, do not imply that the world and worldliness are 'not real', but that they are not 'essentially real', 'essential reality' belonging merely to the ātman, to one's ever-existing, metaphysical selfhood.

<sup>65</sup> vyavahāra and paramārtha - phenomenal existence and the ultimate, metaphysical, eternal domain respectively.

<sup>66</sup> The 'dishonesty' which DK points at is the result of what he sees as unavoidable contradiction in terms between the notion of advaita (non-duality) and the basic dichotomy between vyavahāra and paramārtha, so keenly adopted by the 'non-dualists'.

remain unaffected by one's adventure into the paramārtha as it would be to deny its effectivity and power, and thus its 'reality' itself. There has to be nivṛtti-sāmarthya just as there is pravṛtti-sāmarthya, the two complementing, correcting, modifying and influencing each other.

What stands in the way of the recognition of this is the widely accepted belief that samādhi is a one-time affair, that one has not to return to it again and again, that once achieved one has nothing further to do about it. Meditation is that to which one returns time and again, and samādhi is only another name for dhyāna when it has perfected itself and become an 'effortless' movement of consciousness to 'withdraw' into itself and be with itself whenever it so chooses and desires.

The problem of the pursuit of Yoga, or sādhana, by an embodied being, has not been paid much attention to, though it is there in the Yogasūtra. After all, the person who engages in sādhana, and for whom the sādhana is meant, is a complex or saṃghāṭa, as the Buddhists put it, made of many things, each having a distinctive nature and reality of its own. The relationship between these at the human level is difficult to understand, but there can be little doubt that each has an autonomy of its own, and that each influences and is influenced by the others.

The Abhidhamma shows a deep and direct awareness of this, but it is only concerned with the nature of

these relationships and whether they are kuśala, akuśala, or neither kuśala nor akuśala<sup>67</sup>. The non-Buddhist tradition, at least in the Upaniṣad-s, sees the problem in terms of the relationship between the individual and the world, but is also interested in their nature and reality at different levels. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad, for example, talks in its Brahmānanda Vallī of the Brahman, that is, the cosmic reality, and in its Bhṛgu Vallī of the ātman<sup>68</sup>. The former is that from which everything proceeds, namely ākāśa, vāyu, agni, āpaḥ, pṛthvī, anna and puṇya<sup>69</sup>, all of which are anna-rasamaya<sup>70</sup>. This anna is bhūtānām jyeṣṭham, namely the 'highest' or 'supreme' amongst all the bhūta-s<sup>71</sup>, that is, the worldly creation of Brahman which contains in it all the pañca bhūta-s<sup>72</sup>, and is their joint creation.

After this, the Bhṛgu Vallī talks of prāṇa, manas, vijñāna and ānanda<sup>73</sup>, but at every level it says

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<sup>67</sup> kuśala and akuśala - good and bad, skilful and unskillful, desirable and undesirable.

<sup>68</sup> The Taittirīya Upaniṣad is divided into three sections called Vallī-s, namely the Śikṣā, Brahmānanda and Bhṛgu Vallī-s, or the sections 'on pronunciation' and 'on the bliss which is the Brahman', and 'Bhṛgu's section'.

<sup>69</sup> ākāśa (space or ether), vāyu (wind), agni (fire), āpaḥ (water), pṛthvī (earth), anna (food, matter) and puṇya (merit).

<sup>70</sup> anna-rasamaya - the physical human body, which contains or which is the 'meeting point' of all the elements

<sup>71</sup> bhūta - element

<sup>72</sup> The pañca bhūta-s - the five elements

<sup>73</sup> prāṇa, manas, vijñāna and ānanda - life-breath, the mental faculty, 'understanding' (in an existential, not merely theoretic or 'mental' sense) and 'bliss'

tasyaiṣa eva śārīra ātmā<sup>74</sup>, implying thereby that the body is not just the body, but all these together, and not that it is only prāṇa or manas or vijñāna, or ānanda, as many have thought it to be. Understandably, it does not talk of ākāśa, vāyu, agni, āpaḥ and pṛthvī, as all these are included in anna, which is the basis of prāṇa along with everything else. In fact, the Bhṛṅgu Vallī goes even further and says annaṃ na nindyāt<sup>75</sup> and annaṃ na paricakṣīta<sup>76</sup>.

The differences and the relationships between the cosmic reality, that is the Brahman, and the reality of the individual in the perspective of this Upaniṣad is not only that the latter depends on the former, but that it is related to it through anna which has all the elements of ākāśa, vāyu, agni, āpaḥ and pṛthvī in it, and moreover, as it is constituted of prāṇa, manas, vijñāna and ānanda, which have their cosmic analogues as described in the Brahmānanda Vallī. Therefore neither the individual, nor the Brahman, may be thought of in terms of any of them alone, nor even in terms of ānanda, as many Advaitin-s seem to have conceived in their systems. In fact, as implied above,

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respectively, depicted here as different aspects of selfhood as a totality.

<sup>74</sup> 'This is the embodied ātman of the former'; the self is portrayed as multi-layered, consisting of a 'body of food' (annamayakośa), a 'breathing body' (prāṇamayakośa), a 'mental body' (manomayakośa), a 'body of understanding' (vijñānamayakośa) and a 'body of bliss' (ānandamayakośa).

<sup>75</sup> annaṃ na nindyāt - 'Do not speak ill of food' (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 3.7.1)

<sup>76</sup> annaṃ na paricakṣīta - 'Do not despise food' (Ibid. 3.8.1)



Śaṅkara in his commentary of the Upaniṣad, seems to deny even ānanda as characterizing the Brahman or the ātman, suggesting that in reality, they cannot be characterized at all, being without any limiting adjuncts or predicates or guṇa-s, which will make them a 'this' rather than 'that', and hence distinguishable and having a 'difference' within themselves<sup>77</sup>.

The samādhi of the Yogasūtra thus can only be of a being who has not only prāṇa, manas, vijñāna and ānanda, but who is also sustained and nourished by anna, the umbilical cord that binds him to the universe. And if it is so, then the 'freedom' that samādhi gives will have to be conceived in a different way, as freedom that gives 'meaning' and fulfillment and flowering to all the other elements of one's being, and makes one capable of carrying out the Upaniṣadic injunction saha nau bhunaktu saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai<sup>78</sup>.

If samādhi makes it impossible in principle for the human person to do this, it is a travesty of samādhi, and no real samādhi at all. Yet, the Advaita of Śaṅkara and the Sāṃkhya of the Yogasūtra compel us to do just this. There can be no 'saha' or 'togetherness'

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<sup>77</sup> In this respect, see the discussion in Sureśvara's vārttika on Śaṅkara's bhāṣya and Prof. R. Balasubramaniyan's introduction to it (*The Taittirīyopaniṣad Bhāṣya-Vārttika of Sureśvara*, edited with introduction, English translation, annotation, and indices by R. Balasubramanian, revised edition, Madras: University of Madras, 1984; Madras University Philosophical Series No.20) [DK]

<sup>78</sup> 'May we be nourished together, may we work together with vigor' (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2.1.1)

in these perspectives and the Upaniṣadic injunction shall remain unfulfilled.

Samādhi, then, will have to be understood in a different way, and so also the Yogasūtra, even though the Sāṃkhyan and Advaitic interpretations and ideals, so well-entrenched in the tradition, had shaped and formed the Indian psyche for millennia. The deep belief in them made any alternative seem absolutely implausible.

The struggle against these interpretations and ideals, however, has also been there in the tradition. The Gītā and the epics are the prime example of this, just as the śāstra-s dealing with dharma, artha, kāma and nāṭya<sup>79</sup>. The Yogasūtra itself may be seen as crystallizing a long tradition of Buddhist, Jain and Upaniṣadic preachers in this regard, centered in 'freeing' consciousness from its entanglements and obsessions with the world of 'objects', which has a compulsive and overpowering character about it. The

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<sup>79</sup> The Dharma-śāstra, Artha-śāstra, Kāma-śāstra and Nāṭya-śāstra are all textual corpuses dedicated not to mokṣa (freedom) in the sense of transcending or 'leaving behind' the mundane world, but quite the opposite. These texts aim, at least in DK's reading, at contributing to a 'better world'. The Dharma-śāstra is all about creating the phenomenal framework, touching on the different angles of 'phenomenality'; the Artha-śāstra, as DK writes elsewhere, comprises of 'classical Indian thought about man, society and polity'; the Kāma-śāstra (consisting of the famous Kāma-sūtra) is not just about the erotic aspects of the human person but about 'worldly desires' in a more general sense, about 'desire' as the fuel of the phenomenal realm; and the Nāṭya-śāstra is dedicated to art and the aesthetic experience.

senses, as the Upaniṣad-s declare, are naturally 'outgoing' and the desire for sensuous and sensual pleasure arising from them captivates, captures, enthralls and binds the consciousness in its silken web. The 'freedom' from this, thus became the central concern of yogic practices which involved 'closing' the senses to the 'world', denying its reality, importance and value and, in the process, denying the reality of 'others', including those that had brought one into being, sustained, developed and educated one. Not only this, but actually the whole 'world' created by man on the basis of his senses, as in art, or on the basis of his intellect and reason, as in knowledge, was denied also. Pleasures, it was forgotten, need not be confined to the senses alone. It was also forgotten that even in respect to the senses, it is the 'active' element of 'building', 'constructing', 'creating' and 'apprehending' that is important, and not just 'passive' enjoyment or bhoga, as has been thought and emphasized in the tradition. The karmendriya-s<sup>80</sup> are central to human reality, and the jñānendriya-s<sup>81</sup> - it should be remembered - are not just bhogendriya-s but jñānendriya-s also<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Karmendriya-s - The 'active senses' or 'outer senses'; consisting of the five 'organs of action', namely the vocal chords, feet, hands, rectum, and genitals.

<sup>81</sup> Jñānendriya-s - The 'knowledge senses'; consisting of the eyes (seeing), nose (smelling), mouth (tasting), ears (hearing) and skin (touching).

<sup>82</sup> Bhogendriya-s/jñānendriya-s - DK argues that the eyes, nose, mouth, ears and skin, seen by the Sāṃkhya

The 'freedom' that yoga seeks cannot be 'freedom' from creativity itself. Rather, it must be that which enhances creativity and 'purifies' it from that in which it is usually enmeshed. Vṛtti-s are the heart of the matter, and the pursuit of yoga and attainment of samādhi should result in the purification of the vṛtti-s, their 'release' from 'self-centeredness', and not their cessation or nirodha as the Yogasūtra seems to say. They should naturally become akliṣṭa. As one walks on the path of yoga, freeing oneself and freeing others; through this mutual and collective freedom, a world of joy and friendliness and mutual helpfulness comes into being, as the Buddhist doctrine of śīla seems to imply. This would be a worthwhile goal of yoga practice, to be achieved through the development of prajñā, which is the kṣurasya dhārā<sup>83</sup>, the 'razor's edge', determining the sense of right and wrong, good and bad, and perhaps, also of the beautiful and the ugly.

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tradition as 'senses' (indriya-s), are not just bhogendriya-s or facilitators of bhoga ('passive enjoyment' as DK puts it, or mundane experience in general), but also - even primarily - jñānendriya-s, facilitators of jñāna or knowledge.

<sup>83</sup> DK draws on Kaṭha-Upaniṣad 1.3.14: *kṣurasya dhārā niśitā duratyayā, durgam pathas tat kavayo vadanti* ('Sharp as the edge of a razor and hard to cross, difficult to tread is this path - so proclaim the poets').