

The First Pada Part 1

The nature of how we think

I. Introduction.

Now we begin our detailed study of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

A "sutra" is a very short philosophical statement in which as much information as possible is contained in the least possible number of words.¹ It can be translated to mean, "thread," in this case meaning a series of thoughts threaded together in order to teach.²

We will consider each of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* from two perspectives. First, we will examine the *Sutra* to get a sense of the yoga lesson from a classical yoga perspective. Second, we will discuss how the lesson of the *Sutra* can be applied to our goal of creating a life of well-being.³ Generally, this second viewpoint will correlate with how the *Sutra* might be applied from a non-dual Tantric perspective.⁴

- A. The name of the first *Pada* is *Samadhi Pada*, meaning "Meditative Absorption."⁵ In this first chapter *Pada*, Patanjali introduces us to yoga, explaining that yoga is ultimately about pure awareness, union with the innermost self, *purusha*.⁶
- B. Patanjali tells us that in order to attain this state we must learn how to stop the mind's chatter, the constant fluctuation of thoughts. He offers us a description of what life is like when we are able to control our mind's chatter.
 - 1. In this *Pada* Patanjali describes the different nature of the thoughts we experience as human beings. He describes how the constantly changing

¹ Bryant, Dr. Edwin (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. New York, NY: North Point Press, at 574.

² Satchidananda, Swami (2003 ed). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Yogaville, VA: Integral Yoga Publications, at 1. To avoid confusion between this resource and Dr. Bryant's book of the same name, Swami Satchidananda's book will be cited: "*The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda)."

³ See, e.g., posted outline of the first talk in this series. *What is Success?*
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks.html

⁴ As pertinent to non-dual Tantric philosophy, and particularly Rajanaka Yoga, the discussions in this talk are based on my assimilation of what I've learned from Dr. Douglas Brooks, author and Professor of Religion at the University of Rochester, as well as others. My perspective does not necessarily reflect his or any other teacher's views. Please consult the references I cite. Dr. Brooks' website is www.rajanaka.com

⁵ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 3.

⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 8–9.

movements of our thoughts inhibit or even prevent us from achieving the life we seek.

2. If that weren't enough, he identifies certain obstructions and distractions that inhibit our ability to think clearly and find what is important.
- C. In this *Pada* Patanjali also describes levels of union or meditative absorption, *Samadhi*.
1. From our perspective of examining how to create a life of well-being, we might consider *Samadhi* as that place of awareness from which we make optimal choices for fashioning a life of success, a life in which we maximize our experience of positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships.
 2. We could additionally consider *Samadhi* as a connection to the place within us where we connect to our soul; that place within us that most deeply longs to meaningfully express ourselves fully and joyfully.

We will examine the nature of our thoughts and the obstacles and distractions to achieving absorption. Next we will conclude our discussion of this *Pada* by examining *Samadhi* as it is described in this *Pada*, as well as the practices and meditation Patanjali outlines in this chapter.

II. Definitions of “union” or “connection.”

Patanjali begins in *Yoga Sutra* 1.1 by telling us the “teachings of yoga” are now presented.⁷ From here Patanjali begins his exposition of yoga. These *Yoga Sutras* are not just a recitation of philosophy. They are also instructions on how to practice yoga.⁸

It is worthwhile to briefly review how I use the term “yoga” when I’m talking about yoga from a non-dual Tantric perspective, as well as when I’m talking about creating a life of well-being. In those contexts I use the word yoga to mean connection with our own inner self, as well as to our family, friends, workmates, community, and strangers; in fact, connection to the entire world and the planet.⁹

There is ample support for using the term in this way:

⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 4.

⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda), at 3.

⁹ See, e.g. posted outline of the second talk in this series. *Yoga as a Path to a Life Well Lived*. www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks.html

- A. Scholars such as B.K.S. Iyengar and Dr. Edwin Bryant, provide definitions of yoga to mean union or connection.
1. Mr. Iyengar, author and one of the foremost yoga teachers in the world, wrote that yoga means not only “union” but also “deep meditation,” “concentration,” “contemplation of the Supreme Spirit,” total absorption with the Divine, and integration with the Supreme Spirit.¹⁰
 2. Dr. Edwin Bryant, author and Professor of Hinduism at Rutgers University, writes that yoga means single pointed concentration with the ultimate goal of realization of pure Consciousness.¹¹
- B. Thus, whether from a classical or non-dual Tantric perspective, yoga involves a complete connection with God, Supreme Consciousness, or Spirit, by means of focused, single-pointed contemplation of God.
- C. There is a difference, however, between classical, or dualist yoga on the one hand, and non-dual Tantric yoga on the other. In classical or dualist approach, there is a clear separation between God, *Purusha*, and the material world, *Prakriti*.
1. In a dualist philosophy union or connection with God requires a complete detachment from the distractions of the material world because, while God created the world, He is separate from the world.¹²
 2. From a dualist viewpoint, the goal of yogic connection requires we disconnect from *Prakriti*, the material world.¹³ Connection to matters of the world, including our thoughts, would thus be contrary to these definitions of union or connection.
- D. A non-dualist view, however, looks at the material world as the home of God, so connection with the world is essential to maximize our connection with Supreme Consciousness.
1. Non-dualist Tantric philosophy teaches us that yoga certainly involves

¹⁰ Iyengar, B.K.S. (2002). *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Hammersmith, London, England: Thorsons, at 48–49. See also, Iyengar, B.K.S. (2011). *Light on Pranayama*. Uttar Pradesh, India: HarperCollins Publishers India, at 4 (yoga means “union of the individual self (*jivatma*) with the Universal Self (*Paramatma*),” and “communion of the human soul with Divinity”). Mr. Iyengar passed away in 2014, at the age of 95.

¹¹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 5–9.

¹² See, e.g., Miller, Barbara Stoller (1998). *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, at 1–22; see also, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 5–6.

¹³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 5.

connection, but the connection is with the material world because the material world is nothing but a manifestation of God appearing in the world's many diverse forms.

- a. God exists in the material world, experiencing itself AS US.
- b. This means that God or Supreme Consciousness necessarily includes every experience that arises, including our thoughts, because this entire world, including our thoughts, is an expression of God.
- c. From a non-dual Tantric perspective, connection with God occurs when we connect with each other, with nature, or with any form of creation existing in the world.
- d. For these reasons, we don't try to separate ourselves from the world. We, instead, seek connection in the world because that is where God resides.¹⁴

2. We adopt this non-dualist interpretation of "union" or "connection" for purposes of creating a life of well-being, a life full of positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships. As we've discussed, it is only through connection with the world that we maximize our potential to build such a life.

- E. Regardless of the differences between dualist and non-dualist Tantric viewpoints, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* provide an extraordinarily effective user manual for learning how to practice yoga in the world.¹⁵

III. What is yoga?

Yoga Sutra 1.2 provides: *Yogah citta vrtti nirodhah*, yoga is the stilling of the changing states of the mind (Dr. Bryant).¹⁶

- A. Other translations provide that yoga is: the "cessation of movements in the consciousness" (Mr. Iyengar),¹⁷ the "cessation of the turns of thought" (Dr. Barbara Stoler-Miller),¹⁸ the "restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness" (Dr. Georg Feuerstein),¹⁹ or the "restraint of the modifications of the mind-stuff" (Swami Satchidananda).²⁰

¹⁴ See the posted outlines of the following talks: Dorigan, William E. (2017). *Our True Nature, The Creation Story and Maya, and Tattvas in the Material World*. www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks.html

¹⁵ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 9–10.

¹⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 10.

¹⁷ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 50.

1. I provide alternative translations because each commentator brings his or her particular philosophical viewpoint to the translation. Certain words, such as “*nirodhaha*,” can be translated to have different meanings, such as: “restraint,” “stilling,” or “cessation,” as indicated immediately above.
 - a. For example, Mr. Iyengar offers a number of alternative translations for the word: “obstruction,” “stoppage,” “opposition,” “annihilation,” “restraint,” “control” or “cessation.”²¹
 - b. Dr. Bryant offers only “stilling,” as well as “restraint” or “control.”²²
 2. As we will see, the choice of translation can make a big difference, depending on one’s point of view.
 - a. Do we completely stop (“cessation” or “still”) all thoughts, completely to isolate *Prakriti* from Consciousness, or
 - b. Do we view each thought as an expression of Supreme Consciousness, and then make choices (“control” or “restrain”) what to do with them?
- B. According to Dr. Bryant, Patanjali describes and summarizes the entire system of yoga in this one *Sutra*.²³ Swami Satchidananda, founder of Integral Yoga, makes this same point, writing that this one *Sutra* identifies the goal of yoga and, at the same time, the science of achieving success in yoga; i.e., the method.²⁴ It makes sense then to take a thorough look at each word of this *Sutra*.

We’ve already looked at the word “yoga.” Mr. Iyengar wrote that yoga refers to a complete connection or integration of our entire being, from our skin to

¹⁸ *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*, at 29.

¹⁹ Feuerstein, Dr. Georg (1989 ed). *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, at 26. To avoid confusion between this resource, Swami Satchidananda’s book, and Dr. Bryant’s book, Dr. Feuerstein’s book will be cited: “*The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Feuerstein).”

²⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda), at 3.

²¹ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 49.

²² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 10.

²³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 10.

²⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda), at 3-4.

the mind/intellect/ego, all the way to our deepest consciousness, our most inner self.²⁵

1. We need to keep in mind that in a dualist philosophy, we must go inside, away from the material world, to find *Purusha*, the Divine. In a non-dualist Tantric tradition, to find that spiritual connection, and to find a rich, fulfilling life, we must connect to the material world as well as look inside us.
 2. Further, to find our true selves, our ultimate potential, we must look outside ourselves because of the feedback and inspiration the world provides us. The world is the mirror in which we must view ourselves to truly see who we are and what we can become.
- B. The next word we look at in this *Sutra* is *Citta*. This word refers to the entire mind or process of thinking: the intellect (*Buddhi*), mind (*Manas*), and ego (*Ahamkara*). *Citta* arises from the *Sankhya* delineation of the mind was created as part of its breakdown of *Prakriti*.
1. *Citta* is organized as follows: *Manas* (the Mind) organizes input from our senses and places the information into categories. *Ahamkara* (the Ego) personalizes this data in terms of how it relates to the individual self, while the *Buddhi* (the Intellect) discriminates and applies judgment to the data.
 2. The *Buddhi* is the link from the material world to *Purusha*.²⁶
- C. The next word, *Vrttis*, means fluctuations or movements, “turnings” of the mind.²⁷ We can think of *Vrttis* as any state or activity of the mind, including any chain of thought.²⁸ It is this chain of thought that can either bring us closer to or farther away from total absorption in the Divine and, for our purposes in these talks, the type of mindful awareness that allows us to identify and embrace opportunities that create a life well lived.
1. In Chapter 41 of my book, *Finding the Midline*, I tell how the turnings of the mind played out for me one day at a Whole Foods in Denver. A person rudely elbowed me to get in front of me in line. First, my senses took in what had happened and *Manas* evaluated the situation; i.e., a really out of shape person just made contact with me in a disrespectful

²⁵ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 49.

²⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 12-13; and see posted outline in this course: Dorigan, William (2017). *Tattvas in the Material World*. <http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks.html>

²⁷ *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*, at 30.

²⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 15–16.

way so as to get in front of me in line. Then my ego, *Ahamkara*, assessed the situation, noticing an attractive woman watching the whole thing. Ego shouted at me that some “manly” display of retaliation was called for and would probably succeed, given my physical condition. I had to impress her! At the same time, though, Ego also pointed out that I would certainly get in trouble and hurt my reputation as a lawyer and yoga teacher. Then, *Buddhi* stepped in and reminded me that I try to be a nice person, don’t want to harm others, apparently am having a better day than this guy, would not ultimately want to date a woman who would be impressed by my fighting with somebody, and certainly don’t want to end up in jail. So, I did the purest thing, the *Sattvic* thing; I shrugged and waited for my turn.²⁹

2. Turnings of the mind can be constant. I recall receiving a year-end bonus check from my law firm and being excited and flattered at the size of it. Shortly thereafter, I found out that a peer of mine had received an even bigger bonus. Instantly, all the joy of my bonus was gone and a thousand thoughts raced through my head as to why his bonus was larger. As each possible explanation arose in my mind I got madder and madder. During this internal diatribe I even became so angry I considered quitting the firm. Then, all of a sudden, I remembered that this particular partner had worked over 1,000 hours more than me, brought in two huge clients, and won a giant appeal that brought our firm even more business. Suddenly, I was no longer angry and could go back to enjoying my bonus, thinking I was lucky to have received so much, given what my partner had done! Fortunately for me, I was able to control the fluctuations of my mind before I “told off” management.
 3. These examples serve as a reminder of how our thoughts can race all over the place, and how easy it is to flip from one mood to another based on nothing but thoughts. It is also a reminder of how the twists and turns of our thoughts can get us into huge trouble if we don’t engage in practices to learn how to “still” or “control” them.
- D. We arrive at the last word in this very significant *Sutra* 1.2, *Nirodhah*. As we’ve seen, this word has been translated to mean cessation or stilling (stopping), but also can be translated to mean restraint or control (managing).
1. A classical interpretation of this word suggests that we want to stop any thought because it might cause us to mistake our pure self with whatever thoughts and experiences arise.³⁰ Because, under a classical viewpoint,

²⁹ Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*, Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC., at 141–142. For a discussion of Sattva, one of the Gunas, see posted outline in this series: Dorigan, William E. (2017). *Tattvas in the Material World*. www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks.html

³⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 16–17.

thoughts belong to the material world, if we attach to any thought we are attached to *Prakriti*, and not *Purusha*.

2. From a non-dualist perspective, thoughts are manifestations of Supreme Consciousness. This is the case because the entire material world is nothing but Supreme Consciousness. We experience thoughts, even thoughts like “I ought to punch this guy who elbowed me in line,” because that thought is part of the flow of Consciousness. We have the option, with enough study and practice, to learn how to refine such thoughts, transmuting them into something of value, something *Sattvic*.
 - a. In the Whole Foods example I took my anger and transmuted it into humor, turning to the all-important woman I didn’t know and shrugged, smiling and raising my eyebrows, as if to say “what a jerk! I’m so above that kind of behavior!” I may have even done a subtle bicep flex.
 - b. In fact, potentially harmful thoughts, by coming to the surface, help us identify patterns of thoughts and behaviors that get in our way. Such patterns prevent connection with a richer, more productive, meaningful life. In the Whole Foods example, I later asked myself why I get angry when somebody is rude? I had several thoughts in response to that inquiry. I realized that I get angry because I have pride in myself; that’s a healthy thing. That led to more thoughts, including: why do I get so angry that I want to react all out of proportion to what is called for? Asking myself that question led to some valuable self-study and emotional growth.
 - c. The point is that in non-dual Tantra, all thoughts are part of Supreme Consciousness, whether “good” thoughts or “bad” thoughts. They are all expressions of the Divine.
3. In our quest to create a life of well-being, we can ask ourselves in each moment whether a thought we are having is bringing us closer to or farther away from a positive emotion, an engaging experience, the chance to do something meaningful, an opportunity to accomplish something, or cultivation of a nurturing relationship. To the degree a thought is not helping us in our effort to create a life of well-being, we can recognize the thought and work with it in any number of ways.³¹

³¹ For discussion and resources regarding how to work with our patterns of thought, see posted outline in this course: Dorigan, William E. (2017). What is Success?
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks.html

4. Think of the entire world as being projections of our thoughts and attitudes. We can control our thoughts, turning our world into a heaven or a hell based on how well we learn to practice this one *Sutra*.³²
- E. When we are able to remove all *Vrttis*, Patanjali says in *Yoga Sutra* 1.3 we then abide in our own true nature. At that point the soul, *Purusha*, is only aware of itself.³³
1. We realize that we are not our body or our mind. We are pure Consciousness.³⁴
 2. This is an important point for creating a life of well-being. As we seek to cultivate a life full of positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships we learn to act from our hearts, with motivation to serve and not for a pat on the back.
 - a. In Chapter 2 of the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna advises Arjuna: “You have a right to your actions but never to your actions’ fruits. Act for the action’s sake.”³⁵
 - b. When we act this way, out of a desire to offer our gifts in service of something bigger and without regard to receiving credit, we are, as Patanjali writes, abiding in our own true nature. It is these types of persons who will, in fact, reap the rewards of a life of well-being: a person experiencing joy, pride, curiosity, and other positive emotions; a person creating meaning at every turn; and a person surrounded with friends attracted to him or her because of such a generous spirit.
- F. Patanjali cautions in *Yoga Sutra* 1.4 that if we do forget our true nature, mistaking our body and mind for who we really are, we will remain absorbed in the material world as our mind continues to attach itself to thoughts of that world. In non-dual Tantra, engagement in the world is the point, since that is where God is. So, we engage our thoughts as we seek the Divine in their flow.

³² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda), at 6.

³³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 22–23.

³⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda), at 6.

³⁵ Mitchell, Stephen (2000 ed). *Bhagavad Gita*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, at 54.

IV. The nature of our thoughts.

Yoga Sutra 1.5 identifies five types of *Vrttis*, changing states of the consciousness, and they are either helpful (*Aklista*) or non-helpful (*Klista*) to the yogic goal of total absorption.

We first look at the concept of helpful and non-helpful.

- A. According to Patanjali, helpful thoughts or *Vrttis* (*Aklista*) arise from a *Sattvic* or pure mind. A *Sattvic* mind exercises judgment (engages in thoughts) to manage the other two *Gunas*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, which are responsible for creating non-helpful thoughts (*Klista*).³⁶
 1. Dr. Bryant points out that from the classical yoga perspective even helpful *Vrttis* become non-helpful to the goal of absolute absorption in *Purusha* because any thought at all involves engagement in the material world.³⁷
 2. It is believed that the non-helpful thoughts are caused by the energies of *Rajas* and *Tamas*, through what is known as the five *Kleshas*, or afflictions that are part of human nature. These *Kleshas* are listed in *Yoga Sutra* 2.3 and we will discuss them in a later talk. The five are: ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life. Non-helpful thoughts arising from these afflictions, such as attachment or aversion, lead to actions in furtherance of those attitudes, creating *Karma*, action, which can lead to even more unhelpful thoughts and actions.³⁸
- B. From our perspective of creating a life of well-being, however, we can look at our thoughts as being helpful or not helpful in terms of whether the thoughts lead to or away from the indicators of a life well lived: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships.
 1. We can increase the occurrence of helpful thoughts by focusing on a “yogic lifestyle.”³⁹
 2. Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, Principle Investigator of the Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Lab at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, writes in her book *Positivity* that reducing negative thinking may be the fastest way possible for increasing the amount of positive

³⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 28–29.

³⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 31.

³⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 28

³⁹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 29.

emotions we experience.⁴⁰ She offers a number of practices to do just that, including disputing the perceived factual justification for the negative thoughts, stopping any ruminating on those thoughts, and practicing mindfulness practices, such as meditation.⁴¹

3. From this discussion, we are reminded that our thoughts really do create our world.
 - a. If we allow ourselves to ruminate on a negative, non-helpful thought, such as “I’m not smart enough,” we eventually find ourselves shying away from opportunities we believe are beyond our mental capacity. Over time we “build the evidence” for this non-helpful thought, turning it into a core belief about ourselves.
 - b. When we find ourselves ruminating over a non-helpful thought, we can try replacing the thought with a positive emotion. See how one positive emotion flows to another when you choose one, such as gratitude, and allow yourself to feel that emotion. It is possible to imagine, for example, that out of feelings of gratitude we might move to feelings of joy or love.

V. The five types of thought.

Patanjali identifies five types of *Vrttis* in *Yoga Sutra* 1.6: right knowledge, error, imagination, sleep, and memory.

If we create the world through our thoughts, then knowing the five categories of thought identified by Patanjali is helpful. Every mental construct we experience has the potential to influence what we think, say, or do. In turn, what we think, say and do directly creates more or less positive emotion, engagement, meaningful activity, and nurturing relationships. A life of well-being doesn’t just happen, it is fashioned out of what we think, say, and do.

- A. *Yoga Sutra* 1.7 states that the first of the five types of thought or *Vrtti* is “valid knowledge” (*Pramana*).
 1. We think something is true based on accurate, factual information that we gain through direct perception of the senses, as when we see a rope in the middle of the road and believe it to be a rope. This is called *Pratyaksa*.
 2. We can also gain valid knowledge through appropriate inference, such

⁴⁰ Fredrickson, Dr. Barbara (2009). *Positivity*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, at 158–159.

⁴¹ *Positivity*, at 158–178.

as when we see smoke and think there is a fire. This type of inference is called *Anumana*. However, for this type of perception to constitute valid knowledge, the inference has to always be true. This means if exceptions to the rule can be found; i.e., sometimes there is smoke where there hasn't been a fire, then the rule doesn't apply.⁴²

3. Finally, we gain valid knowledge when we learn something from reliable testimony from another. Historically, this type of knowledge, called *Agama*, refers to information from divine scripture. However, citing Vacaspati Misra's commentary on the *Sankhya Karika*, Dr. Bryant points out that in order for this type of knowledge to be considered valid, the information must not be contradictory to experience, be supported by reason, and be generally accepted by people.⁴³

Direct perception, *Pratyaksa*, is the preferred method of gaining knowledge because experiencing something directly through the senses is the only way we really know the true nature of something.⁴⁴

- B. The second category of thought or *Vrtti* is "erroneous knowledge," (*Viparyayah*) discussed by Patanjali in *Yoga Sutra* 1.8.
 1. Sometimes we are mistaken in our thoughts based on a misunderstanding of actual facts or a false conclusion we draw from the facts. We distort the facts.⁴⁵
 2. Using our rope in the road as an example, we see the rope but mistakenly believe it to be a snake. We actually saw something real but were in error in our conclusion as to what we saw. It wasn't a snake; it was a rope.⁴⁶
- C. The third category of *Vrtti* is "imagination," a conceptualization not based on anything real (*Vikalpa*), discussed in *Yoga Sutra* 1.9. Swami Satchidananda translates *Vikalpa* as "verbal delusion."⁴⁷

⁴² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 35.

⁴³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 36.

⁴⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 36.

⁴⁵ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 58–59.

⁴⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda), at 16.

⁴⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (Satchidananda), at 16.

1. A *Vikalpa* refers to a thought or impression having no factual basis.⁴⁸
 2. In Chapter 62 of *Finding the Midline* I explain that *Vikalpas* include labels we put on someone or something based on a mistaken notion of that person or thing.⁴⁹ I incorrectly presume, perhaps, that if somebody reminds me of a person I don't care for, that this new person has those same traits. I instantly shy away from that person, refusing to give him or her a chance. In reality, I don't know anything about this person and they could, if given a fair shake, become my best friend or at least teach me some life lesson.
- D. *Yoga Sutra* 1.10 describes the fourth type of thought, deep, dreamless sleep (*Abhava*—absence of awareness; *Pratyaya*—cause or means; *Alambana*—support or basis; *Vrtti*—state of mind; and *Nidra*—sleep). This refers to the type of sleep in which we have no sense of any thought activity, as opposed to when we wake up and remember dreaming.
1. Deep sleep is considered a type of *Vrtti* because there is some brain activity even in such a deep sleep. Otherwise, we would have no memory of the type of sleep we just experienced, i.e., deep or restless, unless some brain activity during the deep sleep occurred to etch a memory of how we were sleeping.⁵⁰
 2. This and all mental activities create etchings or imprints, memories, in our mind, which are called *Samskaras* in yoga. *Samskaras* can become activated at any time by some further triggering experience, perhaps years later. This activation produces more *Vrttis*, which, of course, produce more *Samskaras*, more mental activity with resultant imprints.⁵¹
 3. The very fact that we can remember that our sleep was full or not, tells us we created a memory during the sleep. Thus, *Vrttis* were active.
 4. Dreams create etchings or *Samskaras* of their own. If we dream we are a hockey goalie making save after save, we're creating a memory of that very experience, even though it occurred only in our sleeping state.⁵² Therefore, somewhere inside me will exist the imprint that I was an ice hockey goalie. Even though I may never have stepped out on the ice as

⁴⁸ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 59.

⁴⁹ *Finding the Midline*, at 199–201.

⁵⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 41–42.

⁵¹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 30–31; 41.

⁵² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 44–45.

a goalie, if I have this dream enough I'll really believe that I was a goalie. I'll have a deeply etched memory of it!

- E. The fifth type of thought is memory, *Smrtih*, identified in *Yoga Sutra* 1.11. We collect all of our past experiences as memory. These past experiences come from the other four types of thought, including valid knowledge, erroneous knowledge, imagination, and deep sleep. As mentioned, we store our memories as *Samskaras*.
1. Repetition of the same *Samskaras*, or memories, can create clusters of grooves large and powerful enough to take precedence over other *Samskaras*, thus creating a habitual way of thinking. The size of the cluster draws us toward it as a default reaction to a situation that triggers that particular cluster.
 - a. This can be true of helpful *Vrttis* (*Aklista*) or non-helpful *Vrttis* (*Aklista*).⁵³ So, ruminating on negative thoughts, as Dr. Fredrickson points out, can trigger and increase the power of related clusters of negative thought.
 - b. The good news, however, is that focus on positive thoughts can give associated positive clusters greater power.
 2. I discussed this process of memory in a previous talk, as well as in *Finding the Midline*, primarily in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.⁵⁴ Citing work from a number of behavioral psychologists, such as Drs. Daniel Goleman, Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, Richard Lannon, and Daniel Siegel, I describe how we can actually reprogram our brain based on positive messaging, creating these very clusters.⁵⁵
 5. This is the very point Dr. Barbara Fredrickson makes in her book, *Positivity*; i.e., that we need to increase the ratio of positive emotions that we experience each day as opposed to negative emotions. We need to increase this ratio so that our default response becomes that of a positive emotion instead of a negative thought.⁵⁶

⁵³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 31; 45.

⁵⁴ *Finding the Midline*, at 34–43.

⁵⁵ See posted outline in this course: Dorigan, William E. (2017). *How we Connect—Whether we Know it or Not*. www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks.html

⁵⁶ See, generally, *Positivity*.

VI. Implications of this information about how we think.

Think of what this information means. Literally everything we think falls into one of these five categories of thought. As we've seen, there is ample opportunity throughout the day, and even when we sleep, to have thoughts that are not supported by reality.

- A. For example, we will have thoughts based on pure mistake, such as mistaking the tone of an email and getting angry over something that wasn't meant to trigger the reaction we have. We experience a negative emotion, anger and possibly hurt, when in reality the email was written with fond intent.
 - 1. How many times do we think something to be a fact when we are in error, thinking a "rope" is a "snake?"
 - 2. How often do we think a politician or newscaster is telling us the truth about something important, but they are not?
- B. Not only do we make mistakes as to what to think of something, sometimes our thoughts won't be based on any fact at all. Instead, our thoughts will arise from pure imagination, fanciful mental constructs we've created regarding a particular person or event. We're deluded.
 - 1. Somebody doesn't reply to our text or email and we think they are ignoring us. In reality, they're in a meeting, at the hospital, their phone battery ran out, or who knows what else? We fabricate an entire story based on a belief that the person is ignoring us when there are no facts to support that belief. We simply made it up.
 - 2. This is just one example of how *Vikalpas* can impede the creation of nurturing relationships. Isn't this what prejudice, bias, stereotyping, and every other type of "other" labeling is really all about? Aren't we looking at a person we don't know and based on the label we attach putting them into a box, whether by their look, their race, their attire, or their behavior?
 - 3. Acting from our imagination as to what somebody is like, we never get to know him or her. This puts a life of well-being even more beyond the grasp.
- C. Also startling is that we can dream things and, believing they are real, act in real life as if the events were real. We are building *Samskaras*, or clusters of related thoughts, even as we sleep.

- D. When our choices are not always made from reality, how do we overcome that fact and fashion a world in which we regularly experience positive emotion and engage in meaningful tasks, as well as create and sustain relationships?
1. Compounding this problem is our fast-paced lifestyle. We don't even take time to slow down and take the time to access our memories, our life's experiences, so as to make choices aided by what we've learned through the years. So, we must engage in practices that cause us to slow our minds down. We will explore practices identified by Patanjali in this *Pada* in another talk.
 2. How often do we let ourselves get so busy we don't even allow space to remember what we've been studying in this course: that we are born to connect and revel in each other's interesting diversity? So, we must learn to slow down the pace of our activities, choosing to let go of habits that waste our time.

Patanjali recognized that we can all too easily misidentify with erroneous thoughts or unsupported perceptions and this leads to our suffering in the world.⁵⁷ If we choose to live a life of well-being we can benefit from listening to what Patanjali teaches us about sorting through our thoughts so we are operating on all mental “cylinders.”

VII. Obstacles and distractions to controlling the chattering of the mind.

In *Yoga Sutras* 1.30 and 1.31 Patanjali lists thirteen obstacles or distractions that interfere with achieving connection. They keep our thoughts enmeshed in worldly or selfish pursuits. Each of these can block us on the path to creating a life of well-being. (These are different from the five *Kleshas*, referenced earlier, in that the *Kleshas* are considered more permanent and deeply engrained.⁵⁸)

- A. *Yoga Sutra* 1.30 lists nine obstacles: disease, idleness, doubt, carelessness, sloth, lack of detachment, misapprehension, non-attaining the stages of yoga, and instability.

Regarding this list, Dr. Georg Feuerstein wrote that anything that prevents us from developing the capacity to look within is considered an obstacle. This is the case because things such as disease or psychic weakness may develop no matter how hard a person practices. As a result, he warns, meditation alone is not a sufficient practice. A person must also engage in self-study and

⁵⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 16

⁵⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 118.

psychological work as required.⁵⁹

1. Disease (*Vyadhi*). This historically relates to the Ayurvedic medicine view that an imbalance of bodily fluids or imbalance of the *Doshas*, the three Ayurvedic body/mind personalities of *Pitta*, *Vata*, and *Kapha*, can lead to disease.⁶⁰ We all know from our own experience that when we are ill our ability to be at our best is diminished, so Patanjali is telling us to watch what we eat and drink, how we take care of ourselves.
2. Idleness (*Styana*). This results from being stuck mentally and the mind is not inclined to engage in any productive thought.⁶¹ It refers to mental laziness or lack of perseverance.⁶²
3. Doubt (*Samsaya*). Doubt can block connection in any number of ways. Remembering our competency, supported by nurturing friends, we can more easily summon the courage to make decisions.
4. Carelessness (*Pramada*). From a yoga perspective, this includes the failure to follow the eight limbs of yoga, discussed in the second *Pada*. This includes a failure to be mindful.
5. Sloth (*Alasya*). This arises from a lack of effort in mind or body and is associated with heaviness due to an excess of *Kapha Dosha*. I find that a more vigorous exercise program, whether vinyasa yoga or some other form of activity, can help me increase my energy, allowing me to take on tasks with a refreshed attitude.
6. Lack of detachment (*Avirati*). We are unable to refrain from chasing after sensory gratification.
7. Misapprehension (*Bhrantidarsana*). This is similar to mistaken thought.
8. Non-attaining the stages of yoga; failure to practice. (*Alabadha bhumikatva*).
9. Instability (*Anavasthitatvani*). This means that a person may achieve a spiritual state but is unable to maintain it. Such a person is unsettled, not able to maintain progress.

⁵⁹ Feuerstein, Dr. Georg (1989). *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, at 46.

⁶⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 118.

⁶¹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 118.

⁶² *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 83.

B. *Yoga Sutra* 1.31 lists four additional problems, called distractions: sorrow, despair, unsteadiness of the body, and irregular breathing.

1. Sorrow, pain or suffering (*Duhkha*).
2. Dejection, depression, or despair (*Daurmanasya*).
3. Unsteadiness of the body (*Angamejayatva*).
4. Incorrect inhalation and exhalation (*Svasaprasvasah*). Simply by slowing down our breathing and paying attention to it, we can slow the chattering of our mind and, from that calmer place, make choices that help us build a life of well-being.

VIII. Conclusion.

We've now seen in brief overview how we think, and the obstacles and distractions that can cloud our thinking. Next, we'll delve into the subject of *Samadhi*, meditative absorption.