

The First *Pada* – Part 2

Exploring *Samadhi*

I. Introduction.

The name of the first *Pada* of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is *Samadhi Pada*, which means "Meditative Absorption."¹

A. Patanjali tells us at the very beginning of the Yoga Sutras, in Yoga Sutra 1.2, the goal of yoga is to control the chattering of the mind so we can achieve meditative absorption, *Samadhi*. *Samadhi* refers to connection to God, which, according to Patanjali, requires stilling the thoughts so that a single-pointed focus can be maintained.

B. *Samadhi* is a very specific teaching and it is not my intent to suggest that there is any substitute for following Patanjali's practices.

1. We will briefly explore Patanjali's *Samadhi* today because a purpose of this series is to explore yoga philosophy as it can be used in our every day life. Hopefully, the promise offered by *Samadhi* will prompt you to take up or deepen your meditation practice, yoga practices, or some other "mindfulness" activity.
2. From our perspective of examining how to create a life well lived, we can consider this discussion of *Samadhi* as informative of how to find that place of awareness from which we make optimal choices. By "optimal choices" I mean a life in which we maximize our experience of positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships. Quoting Dr. Georg Feuerstein, Dr. Edwin Bryant reminds us that Patanjali's work is tailor-made as a "map" for introspective, psychological purposes.²

II. Exploring the stages of *Samadhi* identified by Patanjali.

Following is a brief overview of the discussion of *Samadhi* contained in the first *Pada*.

A. There are actually a number of stages of *Samadhi* including subdivisions of certain stages. These stages fall into two categories; *Samprajnata-Samadhi* and *Asamprajnata-Samadhi*. Each stage requires that the mind has already achieved the

¹ Bryant, Dr. Edwin (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. New York, NY: North Point Press, at 3.

² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 61-62, quoting Feuerstein, Dr. Georg (1980). *The Philosophy of Classical Yoga*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, at 117.

complete cessation of the fluctuation of thoughts, *Vrttis*, discussed by Patanjali in Yoga Sutra 1.2.³

B. In our discussion tonight we owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Edwin Bryant for his book, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, with his thorough, yet eminently understandable explanation of the “esoteric teachings of yoga,” and particularly the discussion of *Samadhi*.⁴ Without his work, lay teachers such as me would have an extremely difficult, if not impossible task in trying to teach this information to students.

C. Following is a very brief discussion of the stages of *Samadhi* collectively called *Samprajnata-Samadhi*. Each *Samadhi* in this group involves, in some way, an active *Citta*, the mind, even though thoughts are no longer fluctuating.⁵

1. *Vitarka-Samadhi*. Yoga Sutra 1.17 introduces us to the first stage of *Samadhi*, *Vitarka-Samadhi*. This stage refers to meditation on a physical object, such as the statue or physical image of a Hindu God, called a *Murti*.

- a. Regardless of the physical object used, the object serves as support (*Alambana*) for the mind in order to hold its single-pointed focus. *Purusha* moves through *Citta* by use of the object. The person meditating, although engaged in an uninterrupted focus on the object, is still connected to the material world, *Prakriti* because the mind is at work holding consciousness by use of the object.
- b. The image of the object on the mind, in this case the *Murti*, is known as *Pratyaya*. A *Pratyaya* differs from a *Vrtti* in that the *Pratyaya* image on the mind at this stage of meditation is fixed and doesn't change, whereas a *Vrtti* is more a series of thoughts or images.⁶
- c. *Vitarka-Samadhi* is the entry level of experience in *Samadhi*, involving use of the five gross elements, the *Mahabhutas* of the *Tattvas* (earth, water, fire, air, and space).⁷

2. *Savitarka-Samapattih*. Yoga Sutra 1.42 identifies a subpart, or layer, of *Vitarka-Samadhi*, called *Savitarka-Samadhi*. This refers to a situation in

³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 68.

⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 61.

⁵ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 71.

⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 43; 62.

⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 62.

which a person selects an object for meditation and his or her awareness of that object is colored by mental images based on names or labels of the object that connote some meaning to that person; i.e., conceptualizations or *Vikalpas*.

- a. Dr. Bryant points out that since the person meditating is in *Samadhi*, there are no fluctuating thoughts about the object because, by being in *Samadhi*, fluctuations have ceased. However, the undivided attention on the object is influenced by some subconscious knowledge (*Samskaras*) about the object based on its name or label.
- b. I can think of times when I meditate using a *Murti* as an object. Often I know the mythology of the *Murti*; in fact, that is likely why I chose the particular Deity to begin with. For example, I might meditate using Hanuman as an example. Regardless of how much I simply focus on the form of the *Murti*, I'm sure my subconscious "feeds" my meditation with the history I have learned about Hanuman. So, as I become absorbed in the *Murti* of Hanuman, that absorption no doubt has been biased or colored to some degree.

3. *Nirvitarka-Samadhi*. Yoga Sutra 1.43 identifies a second layer of *Vitarka-Samadhi*, called *Nirvitarka-Samapatti*. Here, the person meditating absorbs the object without any influence of names or labels, with no *Samskaras* (memories associated with a name or label for the object) involved to affect the meditation. The mind transforms into the object without aid of any preconceived notions about the object.⁸ In *Nirvitarka-Samapatti*, the person meditating connects to the object free of any mental constructs that might otherwise influence that connection. All sense of time and space disappear.⁹

4. *Vicara-Samadhi*. Yoga Sutra 1.17 identifies *Vicara-Samadhi* as the second level of *Samadhi* (after *Vitarka-Samadhi* and its two layers: *Savitarka-Samadhi* and *Nirvitarka-Samadhi*). This stage of *Samadhi* refers to absorption of the more subtle energy of the object of meditation, rather than its gross form. The person meditating experiences the object in the form of its more subtle elements, the *Tanmatras* of the *Tattvas*, as well as *Ahamkara* and *Buddhi* (smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound).¹⁰

⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 145-149.

⁹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 151.

¹⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 62-63. See, also, the posted outlines of the following talks in this series: *The Creation Story and Maya and Tattvas in the Material World*. Dorigan, William (2014). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

- a. Using a *Murti* (statue) of *Ishvara* as an example, Dr. Bryant distinguishes *Vicara-Samadhi* from *Vitarka-Samadhi* by stating that when we concentrate on the actual physical *Murti* as the support for our single-pointed focus, this is *Vicara-Samadhi*. When, however, we focus instead on an aspect of *Ishvara*'s character, this becomes *Vitarka-Samadhi*.
- b. Here we've moved from gross to subtle. In both cases the mind has merged with the object; however, it is the difference in subtlety that marks the distinction.¹¹ By moving from gross to subtle, the person meditating is moving away from *Prakriti*, the material world, and toward *Purusha*.
- c. Going through the gross elements to the experience of the subtle elements of an object is the key to moving to deeper stages of *Samadhi*. Patanjali explains in Yoga Sutra 1.40 that with mastery over the mind, a yogi can penetrate any form of matter, *Prakriti*, no matter how big or small and, in doing so. Perhaps even assume that form's shape, according to scholars.¹²
- d. Patanjali states in Yoga Sutra 1.41 that the mind can become just like a transparent jewel, taking on the form of whatever object is before it. This means the mind can penetrate the very essence of the object of penetration.¹³
- e. This means that a yogi's mind can penetrate beyond the gross elements, to the subtle elements, the *Tanmatras* of the *Tattvas*: smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound, as well as *Ahamkara* and *Buddhi*, at which point only *Purusha* remains as an object of meditative focus.¹⁴
- f. In Yoga Sutra 1.45 Patanjali says that the subtlest layer of *Prakriti* is consciousness, which can become pure when there is a complete cessation of the fluctuations of the mind.¹⁵

¹¹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 63-64.

¹² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 141.

¹³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 142-43.

¹⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 155.

¹⁵ Iyengar, B.K.S. (2002). *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Hammersmith, London, England: Thorsons, at 97.

5. *Savicara-Samadhi*. In Yoga Sutra 1.44 Patanjali identifies two layers of *Vicara-Samadhi*; *Savicara-Samadhi* and *Nirvicara-Samadhi*. In *Savicara-Samadhi*, the person meditating experiences the subtle aspects of the object as existing in present time and bounded by space. The object of the meditation has dissolved and that person only experiences subtle energy without any space or time context.¹⁶

6. *Nirvicara-Samadhi*. In *Nirvicara-Samadhi*, however, the person meditating goes even deeper, losing the sense of time and space.¹⁷

- a. Yoga Sutra 1.47 provides that clarity of the inner self, *Vaisaradya*, arises at the point of *Nirvacara-Samadhi*. Yoga Sutra 1.48 refers to this state as *Rtambhara*, truth-bearing wisdom, or intellectual essence.
- b. In Yoga Sutra 1.50 Patanjali says that this truth-bearing wisdom produces a certain form of *Samskara* that can block the creation of new *Samskaras* or the effect of any latent *Samskaras* that have not already activated *Karma*. These wisdom *Samskaras* show the yogi the distinction between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* and allow the yogi to accordingly make choices honoring that distinction.¹⁸

7. *Ananda-Samadhi* is the next level of *Samadhi* and refers to an experience of bliss arising during the meditation. In order for this stage to be reached, a person has increased the prevalence of *Sattva Guna*.¹⁹

8. *Asmita-Samadhi* is the next stage of *Samprajnata-Samadhi*. It refers to awareness penetrating all the way to *Buddhi*, which is the part of the material world, *Prakriti*, closest to *Purusha*. Here *Buddhi* turns away from any external objects and, instead, focuses on *Purusha* itself. *Purusha* becomes the object of meditation, and this brings about a stage of one experiencing himself or herself simply as “I am.” Here an individual’s consciousness, *Citta*, clearly understands his or her true nature as Consciousness itself.²⁰

D. *Asamprajnata-Samadhi*. All stages we’ve discussed up to now fall under the category of *Samprajnata-Samadhi*, each somehow involving mind activity. The last stage of *Samadhi* is “beyond the mind” and named by scholars as *Asamprajnata-*

¹⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 152.

¹⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 152-53.

¹⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 162-63.

¹⁹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 65-66.

²⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 67.

Samadhi.²¹ *Asamprajnata-Samadhi* is described in Yoga Sutra 1.18 as the “other” *Samadhi*, meaning “other than” *Samprajnata-Samadhis*.

Here is the place where a person in meditation becomes completely absorbed in *Purusha* without any support from the material world; i.e., no object. When this goal is reached, there is no awareness of *Citta*, since all thoughts have stopped and consciousness has dissolved.²²

1. Yoga Sutra 1.46 describes the earlier stages discussed above as being *Samadhi* “with seeds” (*Sabijah*). Patanjali refers to those earlier stages in this way because they each require an object for meditation focus, either in the gross form or subtle form. This focus of the mind on any object results in *Samskaras*, memory imprints.

2. In Yoga Sutra 1.49 Patanjali points out we have the potential to penetrate to the very subtle essence of an object and that such penetration creates knowledge superior to inference and scripture because such states of *Samadhi* allow that person to experience the object at the deepest levels. At these higher stages a person’s awareness is no longer limited to his or her own body and, therefore, can penetrate all objects.²³

3. In Yoga Sutra 1.51 Patanjali discusses “seedless” *Samadhi* (*Nirbijah*). A person’s consciousness no longer has a focus on any object, at the gross or subtle levels and *Purusha* is aware only of itself. This differs from *Asmita-Samadhi* because *Purusha* is not using *Citta* to reflect back on itself because *Citta*, as part of *Prakriti*, is no longer involved in this process in seedless *Samadhi*.²⁴

4. At this point a *Samskara*, called *Nirodha-Samskara*, develops and blocks all *Samskaras* of any type.

5. The mind at this level completely stops which suggests death of the body. *Samsara*, the recycling of birth and death, terminates.²⁵

III. Thoughts on what we’ve just discussed.

As we go about our day we can use this information to bring a greater sense of awareness to what is going on around us. By way of example:

²¹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 71.

²² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 70-72.

²³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 160-161.

²⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 165.

²⁵ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 166-67.

A. Instead of considering a person only from the perspective of outside appearance; i.e., their clothing, their hair, their shape, and their face, can we try to tune in to their subtle essence? Are they happy, sad, full of humor, or depressed, by way of example?

B. If a subordinate at work approaches us with a problem, do they seem afraid, lacking in confidence? Does the person seem like somebody who could use a confidence-booster?

C. Maybe the person we meet at a party or stand next to in line at the store is a particularly interesting person, somebody who would be fun to talk with and who can teach us something.

D. Does our spouse, partner, or child have something in their eyes that tells us something we need to know?

Hopefully, it is obvious that if we bring this degree of mindfulness to our relationships, we are likely to build more solid relationships and keep the ones we already have. Similarly, by learning how to pay greater attention to each moment, we can become more proficient in identifying the “essence” of each moment; i.e., what does the situation call for? Where can I contribute?

III. Conclusion.

We will continue our study of the first *Pada* next week, moving on to the practices identified by Patanjali.