

# The First *Pada* — Part 3

## Practices

### I. Introduction.

We've discussed at some length the first *Pada* of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, *Samadhi Pada*, including a discussion of how that information can inform us as we go about our day, trying to create a life well lived.<sup>1</sup>

The word *Samadhi* means “Meditative Absorption.”<sup>2</sup> While Patanjali teachings are invaluable for anybody on a path seeking connection to God, his Yoga Sutras are also an incredible resource for helping us mindfully live in a way that enhances our well-being. The Yoga Sutras are a blueprint for finding more positive emotion in our life, more engagement, greater meaning and accomplishment, and enriched personal relationships.

How does an understanding of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras aid us in our efforts at cultivating a life well lived?

A. We know that the ultimate goal of yoga is to control the chattering of the mind so we can achieve meditative absorption, *Samadhi*, that place where our own consciousness ceases to be aware of anything other than consciousness itself, *Purusha*.<sup>3</sup> According to Patanjali, we attain such absorption by stilling the thoughts so that a single-pointed focus can be maintained, eventually leading to total absorption in *Purusha*.<sup>4</sup>

Stilling of the thoughts removes the chatter that interferes with connection to our soul, the place where we make a spiritual connection to the Divine. So, too, meditative practices quiet our mind so that we are not distracted and miss opportunities for positive emotion, engagement, meaningful accomplishment, and nurturing relationships. We hear so often about the need to be mindful in order to live a life of well-being. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, a true manual for meditation, teach us how to be mindful.

B. Last week we discussed the different stages of *Samadhi*, that fall into two broad categories: *Samprajnata-Samadhi* and *Asamprajnata-Samadhi*. We also

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<sup>1</sup> See the posted outlines for the talks in this series pertaining to the First *Pada*: *The First Pada – Part 1 The Nature of how we think* and *The First Pada – Part 2 Exploring Samadhi*. Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

<sup>2</sup> Bryant, Dr. Edwin (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. New York, NY: North Point Press, at 3.

<sup>3</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 9.

<sup>4</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 20-21.

talked about how these stages have a parallel in our day-to-day activities; how they suggest ways to live more mindfully.<sup>5</sup>

Each stage, regardless of category, requires that the mind has already achieved the complete cessation of fluctuation of thoughts, *Vrttis*, discussed by Patanjali in Yoga Sutra 1.2.<sup>6</sup> As we discussed last week, imagine how our relationships might improve if we learned to truly listen to those with whom we engage in conversation. Imagine how the quality of our life would skyrocket if we learned to pay attention to the amazing world around us, undistracted by a never-ending torrent of thoughts that hinder that attentiveness.

Tonight we conclude our discussion of the First *Pada* by taking a look at those practices Patanjali tells us involve achieving success in our meditation.

## II. The practices.

We know that yoga is about the restraining or stilling the fluctuating states of our mind. We've talked about the nature of our thoughts and now we turn our attention to what Patanjali has to say about ways to restrain those thoughts.

A. In Yoga Sutra 1.12 Patanjali provides two methods or “means” for stilling the movements of thoughts: 1) repeated practice (*Abhyasa*) and; 2) detachment (*Vairagya*).<sup>7</sup> These are sometimes referred to as the “Twin Pillars” of yoga. Patanjali tells us in Yoga Sutra 1.13 that “practice” refers to continuous effort (*Yatna*) to maintain a tranquil and steady single-pointed focus of the mind.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Iyengar advises that this practice means embracing all limbs of the eight-fold path of yoga, described by Patanjali in the second *Pada*.<sup>9</sup> This means we must cultivate the moral and ethical precepts of how to treat others as well as ourselves.

Again, we need to be honest with ourselves: how often do we pay undivided attention to anything, particularly our loved ones? Try paying complete attention to the next person you speak with. It doesn't take long to see how learning to focus on what we are doing or whomever we are speaking with quickly enhances the quality of the experience. This is how we create a life of well-being.

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<sup>5</sup> See the posted outline for the talk in this series *The First Pada – Part 2 Exploring Samadhi*. Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

<sup>6</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 68.

<sup>7</sup> Iyengar, B.K.S. (2002). *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Hammersmith, London, England: Thorsons, at 61-63.

<sup>8</sup> *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 63; *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 48-49.

<sup>9</sup> *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 63.

In order for ongoing practice of single-pointed focus to be effective, we must learn to control the influence of *Rajas* and *Tamas Gunas*, those energies that rile us up or dampen or darken our moods. We must create a *Sattvic*, lucid, mind.<sup>10</sup>

Yoga Sutra 1.14 cautions that practice must be uninterrupted over a very long period of time. To be successful, we cannot interrupt our practices even periodically, returning to them only when possible. We have to find a way to manage our daily schedule so as to continue our practices regardless of the temptation to take time off. Dr. Edwin Bryant compares such effort to that necessary to maintain a garden free from weeds. No matter what we do, weeds will continue to pop up unless we are vigilant in attending to them.<sup>11</sup>

Not only must the practice be uninterrupted over a very long period of time, it must also be continued in accordance with yogic principles.<sup>12</sup> I have been practicing a certain pose every day since my teacher suggested I add it to my practice. I recently did the pose while in his class and he told me I was doing it incorrectly and even risked injury if I didn't make a certain adjustment. So, for all my good intentions, my practice was not advancing my yoga. Similarly, I wonder how often I employ certain attitudes and behaviors in my approach to relationships, thinking I'm doing what is helpful to the relationship when in reality I am pushing the person away. For this reason I try to check in with others whom I trust and see if there is feedback that might help me adjust my behavior just like I adjusted my yoga pose.

Yoga Sutra 1.15 states that detachment, *Vairagya*, refers to indifference to the objects of our senses (*Visaya*), those objects of desire that seem to always draw our attention. This includes not only the typically predictable list of things ranging from ice cream, nice cars, a huge house, fame, power, and sexual gratification. It also refers to the psychological realm, including such things as a drive to be appreciated, and even desire for whatever fruits in the afterlife we may believe are due us.

The mind's activities, *Vrttis*, associated with all such thoughts leave *Samskaras*, or memories, that create *Karmic* results, driving us to future acts and thoughts inconsistent with connection to God.<sup>13</sup> Patanjali tells us in Yoga Sutra 1.16 that true detachment occurs when we have perceived the soul, *Purusha*, and completely renounced the *Gunas*, the material world.<sup>14</sup> In our daily life, notice that those times we are mostly likely to stray from a path that best serves us is when we give in to

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<sup>10</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 49.

<sup>11</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 50-51.

<sup>12</sup> , *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 63-64.

<sup>13</sup> See, generally, *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 64-65; *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 52-57.

<sup>14</sup> *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 66-67.

sensory temptations or act inappropriately out of a need to be seen and heard.

Citing rules for interpreting Sanskrit texts, Dr. Bryant points out a general rule that the first thing listed in a list is considered more important than those items listed afterwards. That being the case, practice, *Abhyasa*, by being listed before detachment, *Vairagya*, is considered the more important of the two ingredients, practice and detachment, necessary for *Nirodha*, the stilling of our fluctuating thoughts. Practice leads to detachment.<sup>15</sup>

B. Patanjali reminds us in Yoga Sutra 1.19 that practice and detachment is indeed difficult work. Patanjali states that some yogis, although highly advanced, still remain mired to some degree or another in the material world, *Prakriti*. The scholars say that this sutra includes those who have left their physical bodies but remain unable to attain *Nirbija Samadhi*, the seedless *Samadhi* discussed in Yoga Sutra 1.51 in which the meditator's *Purusha* is aware only of itself. This is somewhat reminiscent of my Roman Catholic upbringing that taught that some souls are not quite ready to enter Heaven when the body dies. This sutra also includes those who no longer associate with any of the material world, but, while embodied, still cling to some form of *Prakriti*, likely *Buddhi*.

In either case, the incredibly evolved beings referenced in this sutra need more practice!<sup>16</sup> Such practice, as with all practice, according to Yoga Sutra 1.20, must be pursued with faith or trust, courage or vigor, memory, profound concentration or meditation, and discernment or wisdom.

1. Trust or faith (*Sraddha*) means the clarity of mind that must accompany any effort towards attaining any objective. When we see clearly we are able to hold on firmly to the belief that the goal is worth the effort.<sup>17</sup>
2. Vigor (*Virya*) refers to physical and mental strength and discipline.
3. Memory (*Smrti*) has been interpreted in somewhat different ways, including keeping a clear mind, keeping the objective in mind, and memory of scripture.<sup>18</sup>
4. Profound meditation (*Samadhi*) has already been discussed.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 57.

<sup>16</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 73-77; Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, at 72-73; see also, the posted outline for the talk in this series *The First Pada – Part 2 Exploring Samadhi*. Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

<sup>17</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 77-78.

<sup>18</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 78.

5. Discernment (*Prajna*) means awareness of ultimate truth, meaning the ability to find *Purusha* out of *Prakriti*.<sup>19</sup>

In Chapter 78 of my book *Finding the Midline* I describe how Yoga Sutra 1.20 has very practical, every-day application to our lives in terms of creating a life well-lived. In the story I tell in that chapter, I describe how I put my faith in taking on a serious yoga practice, finding courage to stand back up, literally and figuratively, every time I stumbled. I kept my goal of personal transformation in mind to help fuel that courage. Despite all the obstacles that got in my way, not the least of which was the notion of an uptight trial lawyer becoming a kind, sensitive yoga teacher, I held to my dream of becoming that man. I became totally focused on the objective of becoming the type of person others would wish to befriend and, in the course of this ongoing effort, I developed the discernment necessary to succeed in that objective; I learned new patterns of thought and behavior that helped me choose appropriate actions and ways of perceiving and interacting with others. It is, of course, a project in constant need of refinement.<sup>20</sup>

In Yoga Sutras 1.21 and 1.22 Patanjali points out practice must be intense. Patanjali identifies degrees of intensity, ranging from mild (*Mrdu*), moderate (*Madhya*) and intense (*Adhimatra*). Each of these three levels can be broken down into three levels; i.e., an intense practice, *Adhimatra*, can be mildly, moderately, or very intense.

C. In Yoga Sutra 1.23 Patanjali tells us that profound meditation (*Pranidhanad*) upon God (*Isvara*) is another way to attain the goal of yoga, stopping the fluctuating or chattering thoughts of our mind and realization of *Purusha*. According to Dr. Bryant, meditating with God as the object is the most “expedient path” to achieving the ultimate goal of yoga.<sup>21</sup>

To assist us in understanding the nature of the God, Patanjali in Yoga Sutra 1.24 states that *Isvara*, God, is a special *Purusha*, untouched by *Samsara*. This means *Isvara* is untouched by the five afflictions of the *Kleshas* we will learn about in our study of the Second *Pada*: listed in Yoga Sutra 2.3 as ignorance (*Avidya*), ego (*Asmita*), desire (*Raga*), aversion (*Dvesa*), and clinging to life (*Abhinivesah*). *Isvara* is also untouched by *Karma*, which arises out of actions arising from the *Kleshas*, as well as the results of those actions, including the creation of *Samskaras*.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 78.

<sup>20</sup> Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC., at 238-239.

<sup>21</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 85.

Reminiscent of our study of that part of the *Tattvas* known as the *Kanchukas*,<sup>22</sup> we learn in Yoga Sutra 1.25 that God is omniscient (*Sarvajna*), and in Yoga Sutra 1.26 that God was the teacher of all who went before us and is unbounded (*Anavacchedat*) by time (*Kalena*).

We learn in Yoga Sutra 1.27 that God is represented by the sacred or mystical symbol OM (AUM), known as *Pranava*. *Ishvara*'s essence is vested in this sacred symbol such that by focusing our mind on its sound we become absorbed in *Ishvara*. We use our *Prakritic* mind to become absorbed in the special *Purusha Ishvara* Patanjali has taken the time to describe.<sup>23</sup>

D. In Yoga Sutra 1.28 Patanjali tells us that repeated recitation of the sacred *Mantra* OM or AUM with the submissive and devotional goal of being absorbed in God can create a clear mind. Yoga Sutras 1.29 and 1.32 state that this type of particular meditation removes the obstacles and distractions listed in Yoga Sutras 1.30 and 1.31.

E. In Yoga Sutra 1.33 Patanjali describes how to practice creating the clear, *Sattvic* mind necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of union with the Divine. He states that we develop such clarity by cultivating an attitude of friendliness toward those who are happy, compassion toward those in distress, joy toward those who are virtuous, and equanimity toward those who are non-virtuous.

1. Citing Vacaspati Misra, Dr. Bryant writes that by cultivating friendliness or joy toward those who are happy or virtuous, we eliminate envy from our mind.<sup>24</sup>
2. By cultivating compassion toward the suffering, we diminish our capacity to inflict harm on others.<sup>25</sup>
3. When we develop an attitude of equanimity toward the non-virtuous, we are not as likely to be intolerant.<sup>26</sup>

Dr. Bryant suggests that developing these attitudes is an important mindfulness practice because the effort to maintain a *Sattvic* mind will carry over into all of our

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<sup>22</sup> See the posted outline for the talk in this series *The Creation Story and Maya*. Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

<sup>23</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 106-109.

<sup>24</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 128-130.

<sup>25</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 128-130.

<sup>26</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 128-130.

life's activities, leading us towards actions of service and engagement.<sup>27</sup> Mr. Iyengar writes that these states of mind create well-being. He refers to the work of this sutra as laying "the groundwork" for creating a life of self-realization because it creates a state of mind that calms the mind, thus preventing a current of disruptive thoughts.<sup>28</sup>

If we wish to optimize our awareness so as to create a life well lived, we must practice keeping our mind stable and clear. By doing so we are better able to approach life with these attitudes of friendliness toward those who are happy, compassion toward those in distress, joy toward those who are virtuous, and equanimity toward those who are non-virtuous. It should not be a stretch to appreciate how such attitudes towards others creates more opportunities for positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships.

1. When we see people who are happy with life, enjoying success and perhaps even leading an exemplary life, we can be happy for them, feeling joyous for the inspiration they provide, or we can be envious. As we've learned by now, envy is not one of the positive emotions that behavioral psychologists urge us to experience with greater frequency.<sup>29</sup> In fact, it is hard to imagine experiencing any positive emotion when our mind is filled with envy, jealousy, or anger at somebody else's good fortune.
2. Compassion arises out of the heart and is an aspect of love, which is one of the positive emotions we seek in our lives. As Dr. Bryant points out, it is difficult to develop intent to do harm to another when we are feeling compassionate for somebody in distress. If we seek a life where our days are filled with meaningful engagement and accomplishments, then a sense of compassion is very important to us. When we feel compassionate our sense of being of service is triggered, leading us to actions that are meaningful and likely to enhance the occurrence of nurturing relationships in our life.
3. When it comes to attitudes towards others who have behaved poorly, the "non-virtuous" as Patanjali calls them, think of all the negative attitudes that we allow to fill our minds if we are not careful: anger, resentment, fear, disgust, by way of example. How does harboring and sustaining any of those attitudes bring us closer to a life well lived? They likely do not. Instead, these attitudes are precisely the *Rajasic* and *Tamasic* energies that inhibit or even block our mind's ability to see life clearly

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<sup>27</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 130.

<sup>28</sup> *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 86.

<sup>29</sup> See the posted outline for the talk in this series *What is Success?* Dorigan, William (2014). [www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html](http://www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html)

and with peace. When we can view such people with equanimity we don't have to trust them, lend them money, allow them to be in our homes, or otherwise put others or ourselves in jeopardy. Instead, we can give them space to try to get on with their lives. We can give ourselves mental space so that after we've processed whatever emotions the behavior triggered, we don't become captive of those emotions, missing opportunities life provides every day to enjoy it and mold it into what we wish.

F. Yoga Sutra 1.34 provides that breath exhalation and retention can serve as an object for meditative focus. Yoga Sutra 1.35 says that focus on a sense object causes steadiness of the mind. Dr. Bryant cites Vyasa for the proposition that in this sutra (Yoga Sutra 1.35) the term "sense object" includes creating a super-sensuous experience by focusing on the tip of the nose, the palate, the tip of the tongue, the middle of the tongue, or the root of the tongue.

Ultimately, it is important to the yoga practitioner that he or she personally experience the higher realities offered by yoga, such as these super-sensuous experiences, instead of relying on second-hand accounts.<sup>30</sup>

Another object-focused meditation is offered in Yoga Sutra 1.36, which provides contemplating a luminous, sorrowless, effulgent light in order to create a clear mind. Both Dr. Bryant and Mr. Iyengar write that this sutra involves concentration on the heart *Chakra*, the "seat of the soul," according to Mr. Iyengar. Dr. Bryant states that the word "luminous" refers not only to a visible light but also to the light of knowledge of the true self that is inherent in a *Sattvic* mind.<sup>31</sup> This type of meditation reduces or eliminates *Tamas Guna* and *Rajas Guna*, either of which limits the ability of the meditator to see with clear discernment. In a *Sattvic* state such meditation leads to the "I Am-ness" of *Asmita-Samadhi*.<sup>32</sup>

Yoga Sutra 1.37 offers yet another object for meditation – those who are enlightened and free from desires. This means we need to pay careful attention to the people with whom we associate, and specifically those we choose as our teachers or gurus. A necessary prerequisite is that any person we choose to follow as a teacher or guru follows the ethical teachings of the *Yamas* without compromise.<sup>33</sup>

Patanjali states in Yoga Sutra 1.38 a clear mind can arise from remembering and contemplating dreams. Finally, he teaches in Yoga Sutra 1.39 that we can find

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<sup>30</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 132-133.

<sup>31</sup> *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 88; *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 133-135.

<sup>32</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 134.

<sup>33</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 137-138.

steadiness of the mind by meditating on any object that works for us. Dr. Bryant points out that the way of practicing *Asana* (poses) as taught by Mr. Iyengar can be a practice of this type. Focus in poses can itself become a single-pointed concentration upon whatever object is focused upon.<sup>34</sup>

### **III. Conclusion.**

We've now completed our overview of the first chapter or *Pada* of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. In this chapter Patanjali has shown us what yoga is and what it can do for us if we practice.

We next turn to the second chapter, *Pada*, and start by meeting the *Kleshas*, the afflictions that can impede our progress if we let them.

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<sup>34</sup> *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 139-141.