

The Second *Pada* – Part 2

Karma, frustration, and freedom

I. Introduction.

Last week we discussed Yoga Sutras 2.1 to 2.11. In Yoga Sutra 2.1 Patanjali gives us what is called the yoga of action, *Kriya-yoga*, consisting of three means for achieving success: 1) self-disciplined zeal in practice (*Tapah*, or *Tapas*); 2) study of self and study of scripture (*Svadyaya*); and 3) surrender and dedication to the Lord (*Isvara Pranidhanani*).¹

After providing us this yoga of action, Patanjali then identifies in Yoga Sutra 2.3 to 2.10 five afflictions, *Kleshas*, which can get in the way of success in yoga and creating a life well lived. These five afflictions are: ignorance (*Avidya*); ego, pride (*Asmita*); attachment, desire (*Raga*); aversion, dislike or hate (*Dvesa*); and clinging to life, fear of death (*Abhinivesah*).²

In the Sutras we've just reviewed Patanjali has identified the causes of frustration that we can expect to run into in our lives, including their psychological causes, the *Kleshas*.³ These *Kleshas*, or afflictions, can be expected to show up in our lives, impeding our progress towards a mystical connection to God and certainly getting in the way of creating a life filled with positive emotion, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and nurturing relationships; i.e., a life well lived.

Tonight we look at Sutras 2.12 to 2.27. In these Sutras Patanjali discusses *Karma*, the interaction between *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, and the meaning of liberation. Patanjali explains the root cause of why we become frustrated and then what life can look like when we remove this cause.

II. *Karma*.

Most of us have heard of the word *Karma*; i.e., good *Karma*/bad *Karma*. What exactly does *Karma* mean?

¹ See the posted outline for the talk in this series: *Kriya-Yoga, the yoga of action, and the Kleshas – five impediments to a life well lived*. Dorigan, William (2014). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

² Also discussed in the posted outline for the talk in this series: *Kriya-Yoga, the yoga of action, and the Kleshas – five impediments to a life well lived*. Dorigan, William (2014). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

³ Bryant, Dr. Edwin (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. New York, NY: North Point Press, at 204, 229.

The word *Karma* has been translated to mean actions,⁴ deeds, work, performance,⁵ or actions and reactions.⁶

Simply put, everything we say, do or even think leads to ramifications; creates *Karma*. It should hopefully be easy to see that if we spread a rumor about somebody, the rumor could lead to all sorts of potential injury to that person. This is true whether the rumor is factually accurate or not, by the way.

The potential injuries arising from the rumor can include direct and easily foreseeable harm to that person, such as ostracizing that person from a beloved social group. The indirect injuries, however, can be less foreseeable but even more severe, such as when the rumor leads to a loss of work, including loss of health insurance, with resultant economic disaster, or helps cause the break up of a marriage or other special relationship, by way of example.

Less obvious is the fact that even our thoughts have ramifications. If we think, even for a moment, of wishing harm to somebody because we are jealous or angry with him or her, we plant a seed within us that can grow into our committing a violent, harmful act in the future. That act might be directed at that person but perhaps not. What we've done is plant a seed of violence and harming that can contribute to fueling the fire of a violent thought in the future. This is no doubt part of what Patanjali meant when, in Sutra 1.33 he asks us to cultivate friendliness toward the happy, compassion toward those in distress, joy toward those who are virtuous, and equanimity toward those who are nonvirtuous. This attitude creates a lucid, peaceful mind out of which a seed of future violence cannot grow.⁷

In yoga we think of *Karma* as the accumulated set of imprints from past actions, including actions from past lives, which we experience in our present and even future lives.⁸ In Yoga Sutra 2.12 Patanjali says that *Karma* has its roots in the *Kleshas*.⁹ The *Kleshas* produce the *Vrttis*, the mind's constant fluctuating chatter,

⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 195; Miller, Barbara Stoler (1998 ed). *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom*. New York:NY: Bantam Books, at 47; Feuerstein, Dr. Georg (1989 ed). *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, at 66; Iyengar, B.K.S. (2002). *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Hammersmith, London, England: Thorsons, at 119.

⁵ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 119.

⁶ Satchitananda, Swami (2003 ed). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Buckingham, VA: Integral Yoga Publications, at 95.

⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 128-130.

⁸ Iyengar, B.K.S. (2002). *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Hammersmith, London, England: Thorsons, at 119.

⁹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 195.

which can lead us away from our goal of connection to our heart and with others.¹⁰

- A. We create good *Karma* and bad *Karma*. According to commentators on this Sutra, good *Karma* arises, for example, when we worship God or otherwise live in a way that leads us to *Samadhi*, absorption in *Purusha*.¹¹ Good *Karma* can bear fruit in our present life.¹² Bad *Karma* arises when we engage in activities that are harmful and can bear fruit in present or even future lives.¹³
- B. We could think of worship of God and a life leading to *Samadhi* literally, just as Patanjali no doubt intended, but we can also look at these guidelines from the perspective of mindfully creating a life of well-being.
1. Using a non-dualist Tantric viewpoint, we can look at everyone around us as a manifestation of God. As soon as we consider this possibility, we become far more inclined to treat people, even strangers or those with whom we disagree, with dignity. We become more curious about them, trying to figure out what exactly is the specialness this person has to offer.
 2. If we adopt this attitude, we look at the world, including our planet, with a deeper sense of appreciation and wonder.
 3. Living life this way increases our experience of positive emotion as we become filled with wonder, awe, gratitude, and other uplifting emotions. We feel the intimacy of connection.
 4. As we view each other and the world in general with a sense of connection, we find more ways to engage in meaningful activity, ways to serve, using our signature skills.
 5. Treating people with dignity and curiosity inevitably leads to more nurturing relationships in our life.
- C. Every thought leaves an imprint, or *Samskara*, on the *Citta* (our mind) and these *Samskaras* create more *Karma*.¹⁴ Patanjali uses the term *Karmasaya* to identify the reservoir or resting place of *Karma* stored within us.¹⁵

¹⁰ See, generally, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 194.

¹¹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 195.

¹² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 195.

¹³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 195.

¹⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 198.

¹⁵ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 119.

- D. As we've discussed, the law of *Karma* provides that the nature of our good and bad actions determines the type of life we will have.¹⁶ Patanjali identifies in Yoga Sutra 2.13 three ways that *Karma* will bear fruit; i.e., the ways the law of *Karma* will influence our life: 1) type of birth; 2) span of life; and 3) life experiences; i.e., how much pleasure and pain we will experience.
1. Our *Karma* accumulates in the *Citta*, in the *Karmasaya*, and can transfer into a new body, following us along after death.¹⁷
 2. Dr. Bryant discusses what happens to our storehouse of *Karma*, the *Karmasaya*, when we die. The interactions of good and bad *Karma* can result in some bad *Karma* being held over for a future life. Such *Karma* is considered "dormant." We can accumulate so much *Karma* that we will need more than one additional life to work it out.
 3. Good acts can destroy dormant bad *Karma*, possibly in our current lifetime.¹⁸ Taking our rumor as an example, it is possible that we can successfully rectify all the direct and indirect problems we've created.
 4. *Karma* already activated, however, has to run its course. So, if we set harm in motion by our actions, the *Karma* relating to those actions cannot be destroyed.¹⁹ If, referring to our example, we set bad *Karma* in motion by spreading the rumor; the effects of that rumor will have to run their course. If that course continues past our death, bad *Karma* will follow our soul.
 5. Bad *Karma* cannot destroy good *Karma*.²⁰
- E. In Yoga Sutra 2.14 Patanjali says that good acts produce positive fruits; type of birth, span of life, and life experiences; whereas negative acts produce a short and distressed life.²¹ We've already discussed how this Sutra pertains to our goal of creating a life well lived.

¹⁶ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 121.

¹⁷ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 199.

¹⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 199.

¹⁹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 202.

²⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 199.

²¹ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 202-203.

- F. Yoga Sutra 2.15 provides that when we have true discrimination we see that everything, even the pleasant experiences, eventually leads to suffering, or as Dr. Bryant prefers to call it, frustration.²² He explains:
1. Our memories, *Samskaras*, of pleasure, stemming from the *Kleshas* of desire, get us caught up in trying to duplicate the pleasure, and in doing so we can create more bad *Karma*. Similarly, our memories of distasteful experiences can cause us to act precipitously, causing harm, in responding to something that stimulates the *Klesha* of aversion.
 2. Our daily interaction in the world provides the *Gunas* ample opportunity to influence our mind, creating the very chatter that yoga is intended to quell. *Rajas* can agitate our mind, whereas *Tamas* can darken our attitude. Both responses take us away from the pure, *Sattvic* mind that best serves us.
 3. This suffering or frustration all ultimately comes from ignorance, *Avidya*, the inability to discriminate between *Purusha* and *Prakriti*.²³

Again, we can see the direct correlation between Patanjali's teaching and the path to creating a life well lived. Like we do with yoga, we create a successful life out of the choices we make. If I want to be healthy, I have to pay attention to what I eat. As much as I know from experience how much I love ice cream, I can't allow the memory of that pleasure and the desire to repeat it to overwhelm me. If I start eating ice cream for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, I won't likely stay healthy. On the other hand, I can't stand the process of drinking the stuff required the day and night before an important medical procedure. As much as I dislike the taste of the liquids taken before the procedure, I can't allow my aversion to that experience to block me from getting what is potentially a life-saving procedure.

We must learn to recognize when we are driven by desire and aversion. By recognizing these situations, we will be less likely to make inappropriate choices that inhibit or prevent us from experiencing positive emotions, engaging, meaningful activities, and nurturing relationships.

The challenge is to recognize when we are falling under the influence of the afflictions. This is another reason we must follow Patanjali's teaching in Yoga Sutra 2.1: 1) zealotry of practice; 2) self study and study of positive, spiritually inspiring resources; and 3) commitment to create connection in the world. When we live life this way we constantly increase those things in our life that lead to a life well lived. Our mind stays focused on the objectives behavioral psychologists tell us lead to well-being.

²² *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 204.

²³ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 210.

- G. Patanjali cautions in Yoga Sutra 2.16 we can and should act to avoid future suffering.

III. How do we avoid frustration and experience freedom?

Yoga Sutra 2.17 provides that the suffering or frustration to be avoided is that of confusing the seer (*Drastra*), *Purusha*, with what is seen (*Drasya*), *Prakriti*. In other words, out of ignorance we confuse who we really are with the world and what is going in the world. We think we are that world, we are our house and car, or we are the creepy (or fantastic) things people say to or about us.

- A. How does this confusion occur? It occurs out of ignorance of our true nature. Our soul, *Purusha*, sees the world through its reflection in our intelligence, *Buddhi*. From this association we become attached to the world. Believing we are that world, we are of course frustrated with whatever occurs that we don't care for.

Key to ending this suffering is to end this association between *Purusha* and *Buddhi*. For the purpose of creating a life of well-being, we must develop the ability to remember our own specialness and focus on the positive emotions, engaging and meaningful activities, and nurturing relationships life offers us. Those are the experiences that draw us into our soul, giving us the lucid, *Sattvic* mind that is essential to creating a life well lived.

- B. In Yoga Sutra 2.18 Patanjali states that the material world exists so we can either experience the world or be liberated from it. *Purusha* can remain associated with *Buddhi* and remain enmeshed in the material world. Alternatively, we can use discrimination to separate *Purusha* from the material world, including *Buddhi*, and, in doing so, reach liberation.²⁴

We can either dwell on our frustrations and other negative emotions, missing out on life's opportunities, Midlines as I call them in my book, *Finding the Midline*,²⁵ or we can make choices to live in a way that fosters greater connection to family, friends, workmates, and our community.

- C. To better outline the material world for us so we can understand what it is that serves as the source of our frustration, Patanjali in Yoga Sutra 2.19 identifies how the material world is categorized; referencing the form of the *Tattvas* we studied in past talks.²⁶ Specifically, Patanjali refers to: *Gunas* (*Rajas*, *Tamas*,

²⁴ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 218.

²⁵ Dorigan, William E. (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC.

²⁶ See the posted outlines for the talks in this series: *Our True Nature*, *The Creation Story and Maya*, and *Tattvas in the Material World*. Dorigan, William (2014). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

and *Sattva*); *Buddhi* (intelligence); *Manas* (the mind); *Ahamkara* (ego); gross elements (*Mahabhutas*: earth, water, fire, air, and space); subtle elements (*Tanmatras*: smell, taste, sight, touch, and sound); sense organs (*Jnanendriyas*: ears, eyes, nose, tongue, and skin); and action organs (*Karmendriyas*: arms/hands, legs/feet, mouth, genitals, and excretory system).

- D. In Yoga Sutra 2.20 Patanjali shifts his attention from a description of the material world to a description of the “seer” of that world, *Purusha*. Mr. Iyengar points out that although *Purusha* is not reliant on the world, *Purusha* sees the world through *Buddhi*. As a result, we lose our identity due to the influences of the material world.²⁷ Dr. Bryant points out that it is out of ignorance that *Purusha* is misidentified with the reflections of the world from *Buddhi*. This misidentification is the cause of bondage to the material world and, thus, frustration.²⁸ When we forget our own specialness, we become vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy and lack of worth. This leads to all sorts of negative emotions, drawing us in the opposite direction of where we want to take our life.
- E. Yoga Sutra 2.21 states that the material world, which includes *Buddhi*, intelligence, exists only to serve *Purusha*’s sole purpose, liberation, freedom from suffering or frustration. In Yoga Sutra 2.22, Patanjali explains that once *Purusha* has been liberated from the material world for one person, the material world nonetheless continues to exist for others. Yoga Sutra 2.23 provides that the material world exists so that each of us can find our own freedom.

Every time we encounter frustration in our interaction with the material world, this is a chance to figure out why we are attached to this, averse to that. What drives our desires and aversions? When we do this, frustration becomes a useful tool to help motivate and guide us in figuring out how we lose ourselves, confusing other people’s opinions and actions as a yardstick for our value and purpose, perhaps gauging our worth on our possessions.

- F. Our false identification with the material world is due to *Avidya*, spiritual ignorance, according to Yoga Sutra 2.24. Yoga Sutra 2.25 says that when we remove ignorance, this false identification ceases, resulting in liberation. According to Yoga Sutra 2.26, we achieve freedom or liberation through uninterrupted discriminative knowledge in thought, word, and deed, which destroy ignorance.²⁹

²⁷ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 129.

²⁸ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 223-224.

²⁹ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 136-137.

- G. Yoga Sutra 2.27 states that there are seven stages of perfect discriminative knowledge (*Prajna*), or insight. Patanjali doesn't identify these seven stages and both Dr. Bryant and Mr. Iyengar point out that various commentators arrive at different conclusions as to the makeup of the seven stages.³⁰

Mr. Iyengar has created a list of his own to make it more simple for practitioners: 1) knowledge of the body; 2) knowledge of energy; 3) control of the mind; 4) stability in intelligence; 5) knowledge gained from experience; 6) absorption of the various flavors that life offers; and 7) knowledge of the self.

He says that yoga practice can help us conquer the body, restrain the mind, and develop sound judgment. Out of that we learn to act correctly and become luminous, developing awareness of our true nature and ultimately surrendering to God.³¹

IV. Conclusion.

To create a life well lived we must have a burning desire to create that life. Out of that desire we engage in rigorous self assessment of those patterns of thought and behavior that keep us away from experiencing positive emotions, from recognizing opportunities for meaningful engagement, and enjoying nurturing relationships.

We must remember that we have a tendency to forget our own special value as a vital, essential piece of something bigger than us – our world. We forget we are uniquely able to serve that connection. This is our ignorance. Out of this ignorance, Patanjali tells us we will tend to act out of ego, chase after our desires, avoid life's opportunities, and otherwise get caught up in the unnecessary temptations life throws at us.

We now move into the eight limbs of yoga, the path Patanjali provides for those seeking to become free of this ignorance.

³⁰ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 236.

³¹ *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 137-139.