



Yoga Sutra Intensive
A New Way of Looking at Things

Selections from the Yoga Sutra for Day One: Nothing Works

Patanjala Yoga Sutram

पतञ्जलयोग सूत्र ।

A Short Book about Yoga:
The Yoga Sutra of Master Patanjali

(title)



Yogash chitta virtti nirodhah.

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २ ॥

We become whole by stopping
how the mind turns.

(Chapter I, verse 2)



*Ahinsa pratishthayam
tat sannidhau vaira tyagah.*

अहिंसाप्रतिष्ठायां तत्सन्निधौ वैरत्यागः ॥ ३५ ॥

If you make it a way of life
never to hurt others,
then in your presence
all conflict comes to an end.

(Chapter II, verse 35)



*Avidya-asmita raga
dvesha-abhiniveshah pancha kleshah.*

अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशाः पञ्च क्लेशाः ॥ ३ ॥

The five negative thoughts are ignorance,
selfness, liking, disliking, and grasping.

(Chapter II, verse 3)



*Klesha mulah karma ashayo
dirshtha-adirshtha janma vedaniyah.*

क्लेशमूलः कर्माशयो दृष्टादृष्टजन्मवेदनीयः ॥ १२ ॥

These negative thoughts
are the very root of the storehouse,
planted by the things we do.
And then we experience things,
in lifetimes we see or not.

(Chapter II, verse 12)



*Te hlada paritapa phalah
punya-apunya hetutvat.*

ते ह्लादपरितापफलाः पुण्यापुण्यहेतुत्वात् ॥ १४ ॥

There is a connection of cause and effect:
the seeds ripen into experiences
refreshingly pleasant or painful in their torment;
depending on whether you have done good to others,
or done them wrong instead.

(Chapter II, verse 14)



*Parinama tapa sanskara dukkhair
guna virtti virodhach cha
dukkham eva sarvam vivekinah.*

परिणामतापसंस्कारदुःखैर्गुणवृत्तिविरोधाच् च दुःखम् एव सर्वं विवेकिनः ॥ १५ ॥

The torment of change is caused
by those same seeds of suffering;
and stopping how the mind turns things around
to have qualities of their own
allows us to discern how, truly,
every part of our lives is suffering.

(Chapter II, verse 15)



Heyam duhkam anagatam.

हेयं दुःखम् अनागतम् ॥ १६ ॥

The pain that we
are ridding ourselves of
is all the pain
that would have come to us
in the future.

(Chapter II, verse 16)



*Tat pratisheda-artham eka tattva abhyasah.
Maitri karuna muditopekshanam sukha dukkha
punya-apunya vishayanam
bhavanatash chitta prasadanam.*

तत्प्रतिषेधार्थम् एकतत्त्वाभ्यासः ॥ ३२ ॥

मैत्रीकरुणामुदितोपेक्षणां सुख दुःखपुण्यापुण्यविषयाणां

भावनातश्चित्तप्रसादनम् ॥ ३३ ॥

And if you wish to stop these obstacles,
there is one, and only one,
crucial practice for doing so.
You must use kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

Learn to keep your feelings in balance,
whether something feels good or whether it hurts;
whether something is enjoyable, or distasteful.

This practice makes the mind
bright and clear as pure water.

(Chapter I, verses 32-33)



Prachardana vidharanabhyam va pranasya.

*Vishayavati va pravirttir utpanna
manasah sthiti nibhandani.*

*Vishoka va jyotishmati.
Vita raga vishayam va chittam.*

प्रच्छर्दन विधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य ॥ ३४ ॥

विषयवती वा प्रवृत्तिरुत्पन्ना मनसः स्थितिनिबन्धनी ॥ ३५ ॥

विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती ॥ ३६ ॥

वीतरागविषयं वा चित्तम ॥ ३७ ॥

It gives the same effect as releasing,
then storing, the wind of the breath.

It also helps us control the tendency
that we have, of thoughts constantly arising
about outer objects of experience.

It also makes your heart carefree,
and radiant like starlight.
And it frees your mind from wanting things.

(Chapter I, verses 34-37)

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Yoga Sutra Intensive A New Way of Looking at Things

Selections from the Yoga Sutra for Day Two: The Eight Limbs

*Yama niyama-asana pranayama pratyahara
dharana dhyana samadhyoshtava-angani.*

यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाधयोऽष्टावाङ्गानि ॥ २९ ॥

The eight limbs are self-control, commitments,
the physical poses, control of the breath,
withdrawal of the senses,
focus, fixation, and perfect meditation.

(Chapter II, verse 29)

◇ ◇ ◇

*Ahinsa satya-asteya
brahmacharya-aparigraha yamah.*

*Jati desha kala samaya-anavachinnah
sarva bhauma mahavratam.*

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमाः ॥ ३० ॥

जातिदेशकालसमयानवच्छिन्नाः सार्वभौमा महाव्रतम् ॥ ३१ ॥

The different forms of self-control
are avoiding harm to anyone,
always telling the truth,
never stealing from another
keeping sexual purity,
and overcoming possessiveness.

These forms of self-control are mighty codes of conduct
meant for people at every stage of their personal development.

They go beyond differences in race or social status;
they go beyond the borders between countries;
they go beyond what is modern, or old;
they go beyond the various creeds and convictions.

(Chapter II, verses 30-31)



*Sthira sukham asanam.
Prayatna shaithilya-ananta
samapattibhyam.*

स्थिरसुखम् आसनम् ॥ ४६ ॥

प्रयत्नशैथिल्यानन्तसमापत्तिभ्याम् ॥ ४७ ॥

The poses bring a feeling
of well-being which stays with you.
They do so through a balance
of effort and relaxation;
and through endless forms
of balanced meditation.

(Chapter II, verses 46-47)



*Bahya-abhyantara stambha virttih
desha kala sankhyabhih
paridirsho dirgha sukshmah.*

बाह्याभ्यन्तरस्तम्भवृत्तिः देशकालसंख्याभिः परिदृष्टो दीर्घसूक्ष्मः ॥ ५० ॥

Keep a close watch
on the breath;
outside or inside,
paused or being exchanged.
Observe too
the place in the body,
the duration, and the count.
Long and fine.

(Chapter II, verse 50)



*Tasmin sati shvasa prashvasayor
gati vichedah pranayamah.*

तस्मिन् सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोर्गतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः ॥ ४९ ॥

The breath is controlled when,
as you remain there,
the passing of your breath
in and out simply stops.

(Chapter II, verse 49)



*Bhuvana jnyanam
surye sanyamat.*

भुवनज्ञानं सूर्ये संयमात् ॥ २६ ॥

Turn the combined effort
upon the sun,
and you will understand
the earth.

(Chapter III, verse 26)



Chandre tara vyuha jnyanam.

चन्द्रे ताराव्यूहज्ञानम् ॥ २७ ॥

You will understand
the arrangement of the stars
if you turn this same effort
upon the moon.

(Chapter III, verse 27)



Dhruve tad gati jnyanam.

ध्रुवे तद्गतिज्ञानम् ॥ २८ ॥

Turn the effort
upon the polestar,
and you will understand
their workings.

(Chapter III, verse 28)

◇ ◇ ◇

*Rupa lavanya bala
vajra sanhananatvani
kaya sampat.*

रूपलावण्यबलवज्रसंहननत्वानि कायसंपत् ॥ ४६ ॥

You gain the body of perfection:
exquisite in its appearance,
strong, solid as diamond itself.

(Chapter III, verse 46)

◇ ◇ ◇

Ishvara pranidhanad va.

*Klesha karma vipaka-ashayair
aparamirshatah purusha
vishesha ishvara.*

ईश्वरप्रणिधानाद्वा ॥ २३ ॥

क्लेशे कमविपाकाशयैरे परामृष्टः परुषविशेष ईश्वरः ॥ २४ ॥

And another way
is to ask the Master
for their blessing.

A master is an extraordinary person
who is untouched by mental afflictions,
by deeds, their ripening, and their storing.

(Chapter I, verses 23-24)

◇ ◇ ◇

*Tatra niratishayam sarvajnya bijam.
Sa purvesham api guruh
kalena-anavachedat.*

तत्र निरतिशयं सवर्ज्ञा बीजम् ॥ २५ ॥

स पूर्वेषाम् अपि गुरुः कालेनानवच्छेदात् ॥ २६ ॥

Herein lies,
in the most excellent way of all,
the seed for knowing all things.

This teacher is one as well
whom those of days gone by
never allowed themselves to be separated from,
for any length of time.

(Chapter I, verses 25-26)



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Selections from the Yoga Sutra for Day Three: Near Diamond

*Svavishaya-asamprayoge chittasya
svarupa-anukara ivendriyanam
pratyahara.*

Tatah parama vashyatendriyanam.

स्वविषयासंप्रयोगे चित्तस्य स्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणांप्रत्याहारः ॥ ५४ ॥

ततः परमा वश्यतेन्द्रियाणाम् ॥ ५५ ॥

Learn to withdraw the mind
from your physical senses;
freed from its ties to outer objects,
the mind can arrive
at its own real nature.

And with that, you attain
the highest control of the senses.

(Chapter II, verses 54-55)



*Desha bandhash chittasya dharana.
Tatra pratyayaika tanata dhyanam.*

देशबन्धश्चित्तस्य धारणा ॥ १ ॥

तत्र प्रत्ययैक तानता ध्यानम् ॥ २ ॥

Locking the mind
on an object is focus.
And staying on that object
over a stretch of time is fixation.

(Chapter III, verses 1-2)

◇ ◇ ◇

*Tad eva-artha matra
nirbhasam svarupa shunyam
iva samadhih.*

तद् एवार्थमात्रनिर्भासं स्वरूपशून्यम् इव समाधिः ॥ ३ ॥

Perfect meditation
then sees this same object
as its simple self:
its clear light,
totally void
of any nature of its own.

(Chapter III, verse 3)

◇ ◇ ◇

*Kshina virtter abhijatasyeva
maner grahitir girhana grahyeshu
tat stha tad anjanata samapattih.*

क्षीणवृत्तेरभिजातस्येव मणेर्ग्रहीत्वग्रहणग्राह्येषु तत्स्थतदञ्जनतासमापत्तिः ॥

Those extraordinary people who shatter the way
the mind turns things around use a balanced meditation,
which is fixed and clear on its object.

And the object is like a crystal,
with the one that holds it, and what it holds,
and the holding itself as well.

(Chapter I, verse 41)



*Tad asankhyeya vasanabish chitram api
para-artham sanhatya karitvat.*

तदसंख्येयवासनाभिश् चित्रम् अपि परार्थं संहत्यकारित्वात् ॥ २४ ॥

Countless seeds within our minds
make us see
the great variety of things around us.
The way it works
is that they organize
other parts in a certain way.

(Chapter IV, verse 24)

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Selections from the Yoga Sutra for Day Three



*Nimittam aprayojakam prakirtinam
varana bhedas tu tatah kshetrikavat.*

निमित्तम् अप्रयोजकं प्रकृतीनां । वरणभेदस्तु ततः क्षेत्रिकवत् ॥ ३ ॥

...We must destroy the veil of the qualities of things.
And then we must become as gardeners.

(Chapter IV, verse 3)



Prasankhyanepyakusidasya...

प्रसंख्यानैऽप्यकुसीदस्य ॥

You will never have to pay
those old debts back;
not a single one...

(Chapter IV, verse 29)



Vitarka badhane pratipaksha bhavanam.

*Vitarka hinsa-adayah
kirta karita-anumodita*

*lobha krodha moha purvaka
mirdu madhya adhimatra
duhkha-ajnyana-ananta phala iti
pratipaksha bhavanam.*

वितर्कबाधने प्रतिपक्षभावनम् ॥ ३३ ॥

वितर्काहिंसादयः कृतकारितानुमोदिता लोभक्रोधमोहपूर्वका मृदुमध्याधिमात्रा

दुःखाज्ञानानन्तफला इति प्रतिपक्षभावनम् ॥ ३४ ॥

When the images start to hurt you,
sit down and work out the antidote.

The images—people who hurt me or the like —
come from what I did myself;
or got others to do for me;
or what I was glad to hear that others had done.

And what came before them
was either craving, or hating, or dark ignorance.
They are of lesser, or medium,
or greater power.

Say to yourself then,
“Who knows what pain
I have planted for myself?”
Sit down and work out the antidote.

(Chapter II, verses 33-34)



*Sa tu dirgha kala nairantarya
satkara-asevito dirdha bhumih.*

स तु दीर्घ कालनैरन्तर्य सत्कारासेवितो दृढभूमिः ॥ १४ ॥

You must cultivate your practice
over an extended period of time;
it must be steady, without gaps,
and it must be done correctly —
for then a firm foundation is laid.

(Chapter I, verse 14)



Svadyayaad ishtadevata samprayogah.

स्वाध्यायाद् इष्टदेवतासंप्रयोगः ॥ ४४ ॥

If you engage in regular study,
then you come to be with
the Angel of your deepest dreams.

(Chapter II, verse 44)



Yoga Sutra Intensive A New Way of Looking at Things

Homework day one: *nothing works*

1) Who wrote the Yoga Sutra, and when? What does the Sanskrit word *sutra* mean? What are some things that the author is famous for, and how does this reflect one meaning of the word *yoga*? How did Master Patanjali get his name?

2) There's not much use in studying an old book about yoga unless we can use it in our real life. As a yoga teacher, what are some of the goals that you think people hope to reach through their practice of yoga? How does this connect to Master Patanjali's famous, negative statement about what yoga is, and how does it connect to the name of this intensive Yoga Sutra course? Finally, please give the four words of this statement by Master Patanjali, from memory!

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Homework 1

3) Perhaps the most important lines of the entire Yoga Sutra come in the second of its four chapters, or four cornerstones. These lines give us an important clue about how things really work, about this new way that we should be looking at things. How do these lines go, and what do they imply about where the people and the events in our life are coming from? And what is their implication for a future world?

4) Master Patanjali gives five steps or negative thoughts that cause us to misunderstand how everything around us really works. Explain the flow of these five briefly, by using the example of how an aspirin “works” on a headache. Please also giving the Sanskrit name for “negative thought” here.

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Homework 1

5) This brings us to a group of important ideas found in the Yoga Sutra on the subject of karma. What is an easy way to define the word “karma”? According to Master Patanjali, how fast does karma come back to us? What is the number one law that determines how it comes back to us, and how do plants help us understand this law? What role does karma play in the loss of things, like the end of a relationship, and even a person’s death? How, finally, does an idea called the “time gap” explain why good people suffer?

6) A “secret weapon” in creating a great future reality for us and for our yoga students is the “Four Infinite Thoughts” which Master Patanjali mentions well into the first of the four chapters of the Yoga Sutra, as a powerful way of preventing any obstacles that come up in our practice of yoga and its deeper forms. Name and explain these four, in the context of 4 individual steps for meditating on each one, and remember to explain why they are “infinite.”



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Homework day two: *the eight limbs of yoga*

1) Perhaps the most famous teaching in the Yoga Sutra is the one about the eight limbs or steps of the yogic path. Give the well-known name for this group of eight. Then list each one of them separately, explaining briefly how it flows into the other, all with the goal of coming to a correct understanding of how things really work. Comment finally on what we can do with this understanding. (If you want extra credit, add the Sanskrit name for as many of these limbs as you can.)

2) Self-control, or following a personal ethical code, is said to be the foundation for all yoga practice. What are the five guidelines which Master Patanjali mentions directly? As you list each of these, describe how he would comment on what we consider “grey areas” in the parts of this code. List finally an additional form of self-control that is assumed in India and Tibet to apply to this entire code.

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Homework 2

3) Only two of the some 200 verses in the oldest book on yoga actually talk about physical yoga—about what we call “yoga” in the West. What are the three points that these verses give us about our yoga asanas, or poses?

4) What is some of the advice that Master Patanjali gives us about watching our breath? What is the final outcome of controlling our breath, and how is this reflected in our state of mind?

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Homework 2

5) What does Master Patanjali mean when he says that if we “turn the combined effort upon the sun,” we will “understand the earth”? And what does it mean to turn this effort upon the moon to see the stars? How finally does turning this effort upon the polestar lead us to an understanding of how things work? Frame your answer in the metaphor of an onion, and describe the final goal here.

6) Master Patanjali, in the first chapter of the Yoga Sutra, describes a very fast, simple, and powerful optional way of achieving all our goals—better even than the entire eight-limb path of yoga. Explain, including the technique we use here.



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Homework day three: *near diamond*

1) What is Master Patanjali referring to in the lines from the first chapter of the Yoga Sutra when he says that “On that day, the seer comes to dwell within their own real nature,” and how does this relate to an idea called “emptiness”? What role do the last four of the eight limbs of the yogic path play in reaching this day? How does this connect to the “clear light” that the Master mentions further on, and the “path of the diamond” which he also mentions?

2) What, according to Master Patanjali, causes the vast variety of objects that we see around us in the world? How do we use this fact to “load” our actions, in the metaphor of stapler? What worldly occupation does Master Patanjali use to describe how we will be spending the rest of our lives?

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A New Way of Looking at Things
Homework 3

3) So we're on course for our new future; but this quest can be slowed down a lot if we still have a lot of old karmic seeds, many of which we don't even remember planting. But we have hope, because Master Patanjali tells us, "You will never have to pay those old debts back; not a single one." That is, there are ways to pinpoint any karmic seed in our mind, no matter how old, and no matter how serious, and destroy it. As the Master says, "Sit down and work out the antidote." What are the four steps of this antidote called; how do we describe each one of these steps; and which of them is by far the most important?

4) In a famous verse from the first chapter of his Yoga Sutra, Master Patanjali gives us a description about what a daily practice should consist of. Explain.

5) What does Master Patanjali describe as the result of regular study?



Yoga Sutra Intensive A New Way of Looking at Things

Homework master day one: *nothing works*

1) Who wrote the Yoga Sutra, and when? What does the Sanskrit word *sutra* mean? What are some things that the author is famous for, and how does this reflect one meaning of the word *yoga*? How did Master Patanjali get his name?

[The Yoga Sutra was written by Master Patanjali, it is estimated around 200 AD. The Sanskrit word *sutra* means two things. The first is *a thread*; for example, the sacred thread that Hindu teachers wear over their shoulder. Books in the early days of India were scratched onto palm leaves with a needle, and the gouges smeared with soot. The books were bound by drilling a hole through the stack of pages, and then tying a thread through this hole to hold the pages. We can also think of a *sutra* as a book where different ideas are tied together like beads on a string.

A second meaning of *sutra* is *brief*, or a brief book, or the crux of the matter. Now Master Patanjali is famous not only as the father of yoga—the Yoga Sutra is the oldest book about yoga as we know it—but is also considered the father of the ancient tradition of Indian classical dance. He also wrote a famous book on medicine, and another on Sanskrit, the mother of all languages.

The word *yoga* of course means *union*, or *joining*. It comes from an ancient root *yuj*, from which come the English words *join*, *union*, and *yoke* (joining two cows together). One meaning of *yoga* is that we join together the energy of the prana or inner winds of the body, upper and lower, left and right, male and female. This is accomplished by performing the yoga asanas, or exercises, with the proper training or understanding.

The further along we get in this process, the better our health becomes; and in the end we can even hear our inner channels and chakras singing the sacred sounds of Sanskrit. We are naturally drawn then to move to this inner song. And so there we have it: yoga, the philosophy behind it, medicine, Sanskrit, and dance—which is why Master Patanjali was an expert of all of these.

There is a story about how Master Patanjali got his name. His mother, who was a practitioner of yoga, wanted a child but was unable to do so. She made constant prayers that she should be granted a baby, by taking up in her cupped hands the sacred

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Homework Master 1

water of offering, which is called *anjali* in Sanskrit. In answer to her prayers, one day a tiny baby the size of her thumb fell down (the Sanskrit word *pat* means *fell down*) from the sky into the water in her hands, and immediately grew into a strong young boy, whom she named *Pat-anjali*.]

2) There's not much use in studying an old book about yoga unless we can use it in our real life. As a yoga teacher, what are some of the goals that you think people hope to reach through their practice of yoga? How does this connect to Master Patanjali's famous, negative statement about what yoga is, and how does it connect to the name of this intensive Yoga Sutra course? Finally, please give the four words of this statement by Master Patanjali, from memory!

[Let's be honest about why people come to our class to learn yoga from us. The great majority of people want to look and feel better physically: thinner, stronger, more flexible. Of course we hope that this will spread over into how we feel mentally—we hope that the yoga will make us more happy.

There's also a feeling of community in many yoga studios which is very important to a lot of people in today's busy, lonely world. How often does someone touch us in a supportive, non-threatening way? And how often do we lay down in silence with a whole group of people that we maybe haven't ever met before?

A lot of us connect yoga with peace of mind, with learning how to meditate. And in a way, the traditional inspiring words and chants that our yoga teacher might share with us at the beginning and end of the class help a lot of us get through the day—in many cases, they supply the inspiration that an inspiring talk at their church or synagogue has traditionally provided.

And so we come to yoga with physical, emotional, and spiritual goals in mind. As a teacher, we want the yoga to supply our yoga student with these goals. Master Patanjali though, in the opening lines of the Yoga Sutra, makes a very revolutionary statement. *He says that yoga doesn't work.*

That is, the whole point of the Yoga Sutra isn't just to tell us how to do the yoga exercises, or how to breath or meditate—although it does cover these points. But these are only a method to get to the most important subject: how to get our mind to stop making a mistake about how things work in the first place.

As Master Patanjali puts it, *Yogash chitta virtti nirodhah*. *Yogash* here is just *yoga*, which we can also call “becoming whole.” *Chitta* means *mind*, and *virtti* means “how the mind turns things around the wrong way.” That is, we are constantly seeing things the wrong way, we constantly misunderstand how everything around us works.

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This is the most important point of the Yoga Sutra. We think gas runs a car, we think yoga makes us healthy. But that's completely wrong, and that's why we can't get the things we want, whether it's a good job, a great relationship, or the different goals we hope to get out of doing yoga. The *real* goal of yoga then, says Master Patanjali, is to *stop* (which is what *nirodhah* means) looking at things the wrong way. If we learn how things really work, then we can easily reach whatever goals we want. And so, as the name of this Yoga Intensive Course implies, we need *A New Way of Looking at Things*.]

3) Perhaps the most important lines of the entire Yoga Sutra come in the second of its four chapters, or four cornerstones. These lines give us an important clue about how things really work, about this new way that we should be looking at things. How do these lines go, and what do they imply about where the people and the events in our life are coming from? And what is their implication for a future world?

[These famous lines say:

*If you make it a way of life
never to hurt others,
then in your presence
all conflict comes to an end.*

These lines are making a very radical statement about where all the stuff around us is coming from. They are saying that—if we were to remove every trace of violence from our own hearts, if we could never even wish something bad on another person—then we would never see violence outside us, in the world around us.

What this is saying then is that all the violence that we do see in the world now—wars in many parts of the world, personal violence between people on a constant basis—is all somehow coming from us, from something inside of us.

How this is coming from us is what we are supposed to learn from our study of the Yoga Sutra. The implication of just these few lines is that *with our yoga we can change not only ourselves, but our entire world*. If we learn how things really work, then we can just use that knowledge to make anything we want to happen: we can literally adjust our reality as we go. Making the world perfect then—a place without war or sickness or even death itself—becomes something which is truly possible for us to achieve.]

4) Master Patanjali gives five steps or negative thoughts that cause us to misunderstand how everything around us really works. Explain the flow of these five briefly, by using the example of how an aspirin “works” on a headache. Please also giving the Sanskrit name for “negative thought” here.

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[Master Patanjali says that our problem—our tendency to think that things work in a certain way, when they don't work that way at all—starts with (1) what he calls “ignorance.” Ignorance, when we are explaining the flow of what we call the Great Mistake, refers to the seeds that we carry from our past life for misunderstanding how everything works.

That is, it's not just an accident that we come into this life and immediately start to misunderstand how everything around us works. The fact that we happened at all—that we were born into this world—is not a one-time thing. If we roll the dice and get 12 one time, then if we roll the dice one more time the odds are pretty small that we will get 12 again.

But if we roll the dice once a minute for the millions of years that the universe has been around, then we can expect to get millions of 12's. It's unrealistic to think that 12 can only happen once out of billions upon billions of throws, and it's unrealistic to think that this is the only time, in billions of billions of the chances for it to repeat itself, that we have been born.

And each time we came into a new life, we carried over from our past life the seeds of how we used to think back then. These seeds are what Master Patanjali calls “ignorance.” We have been misunderstanding how things work for millions of years, and we carried the seeds for this habit into our life this time.

Whenever something happens in our life, then, one of these seeds opens. Then comes the second negative emotion, which (2) Master Patanjali calls “selfness.” This means that we something as being *it-self*. We can understand what this means by looking at the example of an aspirin.

We get a really bad headache, and we decide to take an aspirin to help. We believe, or at least we *hope*, that it will **work**. We believe that the aspirin has something inside it, we believe that it has something about it *itself*, that will work to take away our headache. The bottle even lists an active ingredient: in Tylenol, for example, the active ingredient is listed as “acetaminophen.”

We believe that this active ingredient is what works to take away our headache: and on the other hand we believe that if something is missing an active ingredient like this then it's not going to help our headache. We don't swallow a rock to take away a headache! And so we think the aspirin has something *in it*, *inside* of it, it *itself*, that is going to work for us.

But the fact is that we can take an aspirin which does have the active ingredient and sometimes it will work, and sometimes it won't work. We have to be brave and face the fact then that it's not the active ingredient which is making the aspirin work, or else it would work every time. It seems clear that *something else* is making the active ingredient active!

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The negative emotion of “selfness” leads on to the next two emotions, of (3) liking and (4) disliking, or wanting and not wanting. It’s very important to realize that these are not in themselves wrong: it’s *good* to want people to be free; it’s *okay* not to want people to continue suffering because they misunderstand how things work.

There aren’t many emotions as strong as *wanting* an aspirin when we have a really bad headache, and *not wanting* anyone to stop us from getting the aspirin. But you see here the wanting and the not wanting are mistaken, since they are based on that selfness, where we think there is something *in* the aspirin that could help us. The fact is that, when we want an aspirin badly enough to hurt someone to get it, then *the aspirin we are thinking of at that moment doesn’t even exist*: it’s an aspirin that has something *in* it that will help us, and there’s no such thing.

The barometer that tells us if wanting or not wanting in any particular case are healthy or negative emotions is: How willing would we be to hurt someone, to get the aspirin we want?

This is where we get into the fifth negative emotion, which is (5) grasping. If we misunderstand how the aspirin works, and *only* if we misunderstand it, then we will undertake an action that would hurt someone else to get it. This is what “grasping” means here: an action, which in Sanskrit is called *karma*. And now we need to learn a bit about that.]

5) This brings us to a group of important ideas found in the Yoga Sutra on the subject of karma. What is an easy way to define the word “karma”? According to Master Patanjali, how fast does karma come back to us? What is the number one law that determines how it comes back to us, and how do plants help us understand this law? What role does karma play in the loss of things, like the end of a relationship, and even a person’s death? How, finally, does an idea called the “time gap” explain why good people suffer?

[We can define “karma” as anything that we do, or say, or even just think, because we have misunderstood how things work. This could be white (good) or black (bad) karma—both are motivated by ignorance at the core: by believing that the aspirin has something *inside* of it that makes it work.

Master Patanjali expresses a tradition followed throughout the history of the great spiritual paths of India when he says that karma can be “seen” or “not seen.” These are code words that refer to karma that gives us a result in the next life or beyond (that is, which is “not seen” in this life); and to karma which gives us a result which is *seen* in this life.

We want of course to see results in this life for the good things that we do, and not to wait for some future life that we may not even be sure exists. Whether we can get this

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to happen depends on how well we understand the **technique** behind making good karma. This is something that anyone can learn, like learning some new yoga poses, or a musical instrument, or a language.

The number one law behind karma is, of course, we get what we give. If we help someone else, then something good will come back to us. If we hurt someone else, then something bad will come back. This law is *absolutely fixed*; as Jesus once said, it would be absolutely foolish to plant a cactus and to expect grapes coming up instead.

This image of planting karma being like planting seeds is a crucial one. If we understand it, then we will find it easy to believe in karma, and to follow its laws to make our lives successful. If we don't understand it, then sooner or later whatever belief we have in karma will break down, and we're back to hoping that an aspirin will work.

So here's the most important idea! When we take an aspirin and it does work, it's not because of something inside the aspirin. It's because of a karmic seed inside of our own mind. Let's say that somebody that we work with has a really bad headache. We take the time to ask them how they feel, and then get them a cool glass of water and an aspirin (even if we know the aspirin doesn't work the way they think it does).

When we hand them the aspirin, this action is recorded in our mind simply by our being aware of what we're doing, which we always are, to varying degrees. It is recorded as a mental seed. This seed stays inside our subconscious, developing stronger all the time, multiplying in power like the seed for a tree. When the seed sprouts, it sprouts as an image in our mind, as an experience. We ourselves have a headache and we are taking an aspirin.

When the karmic seed sprouts, *it makes the active ingredient in the aspirin active*. And then the aspirin **WORKS** for us. This is how things really work, and if we really get it, then we can make just about anything happen! If we understand seeds, then we can get our yoga to work for us—to make us strong and trim and happy. And if we don't, then we might not get what we we're looking for with our yoga.

It's important to realize though that these seeds, left to themselves, are also responsible for anything that falls apart in our life, whether it be a relationship, or even our own body. A seed only has so much power: its energy pushes a tree up out of the ground, but then sooner or later this energy (just *by* pushing the tree out of the ground) is used up, and the tree gets old and falls down.

But if we understand how this works, we can “reinvest” our good karmic seeds. When a seed ripens to make our aspirin work, and our headache goes away, we remember how it happened, and we redouble our efforts to help others take away their pain, thus planting a new seed for another aspirin to work—and on and on. Things don't have to get old, things don't have to wear out.

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The last principle of karma that Master Patanjali refers to at this point is called the “time gap.” Now that we understand that the world around us is in a sense ripening from seeds inside of our own mind, we can also appreciate that necessarily there is a period during which these seeds are ripening within the subconscious, just as the seeds for plants need time to ripen in the ground before they sprout.

This gives us an insight into the age-old question of why good people seem to suffer. Remember that a mental seed can be planted just by a single negative thought, and that like a seed for a tree it gets bigger and stronger as it ripens inside the subconscious. A person can be for example very generous to others, and we know from the first rule of karma that this will always bring them prosperity, even if this wasn’t their motivation in being generous.

Until this seed ripens though, older seeds may in the interim sprout up—seeds that the person planted even just by thinking to refuse to be generous to others. These seeds might sprout up just after a period in the person’s life when we can see that they’ve been generous, but we have to see through the illusion and realize that the time gap is in force here. It is impossible for a generous person not to become prosperous, and it is impossible also for them to have a hard time financially if they have not refused to be generous. So be careful with the time gap (which, by the way, we can shorten once we understand the technique of seed planting).]

6) A “secret weapon” in creating a great future reality for us and for our yoga students is the “Four Infinite Thoughts” which Master Patanjali mentions well into the first of the four chapters of the Yoga Sutra, as a powerful way of preventing any obstacles that come up in our practice of yoga and its deeper forms. Name and explain these four, in the context of 4 individual steps for meditating on each one, and remember to explain why they are “infinite.”

[The Four Infinite Thoughts mentioned by Master Patanjali, and taught elsewhere as well in the great spiritual traditions of India and Tibet, are infinite kindness, infinite compassion, infinite joy, and infinite equanimity. When we meditate upon each of these secret weapons for creating a beautiful reality and stopping our daily obstacles in a powerful way, we do so in four steps each.

The first of the four, kindness, is where we wish that every living being in the entire universe might have all their wishes come true—that they might get everything that they hope for. As for the four steps here, we first (1) say to ourselves how wonderful it would be if this could really happen. Then (2) we strengthen this thought, by making a formal prayer: I pray that this will happen. And then (3) we make it a personal resolution: I will make this happen, even if no one at all helps me. And finally (4) we ask for blessings of every holy being in history in this task: we ask them to give us their help and support, so we can have the strength to make it happen.

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This and the other three thoughts are “infinite” then because we are wishing happiness on every single living being—human, or animal—on every planet in the universe. The ultimate goal of our yoga is to become someone who can actually help make this happen for every one of these beings, and in deep states of meditation a yogi even reaches a point where they see the face of every single needy creature on all worlds, all within a few minutes of time—and sees as well the day that they will become enlightened, and able to go and actually help all these beings.

Because we are trying to do some good towards every single living thing, then the mental seeds which we plant are infinitely strong as well. And because these four help us to develop ultimate love, they always help us—whenever we are down or feeling upset—to take our focus off of ourselves and put it on others, which is the best way to overcome any obstacles in our life.

The second of the infinite thoughts is compassion, where we want to stop even the slightest pain that any living being is experiencing. We go through the same four steps: I wish this could happen, I pray that it will be, I will take it upon myself to see that it happens, and I ask for divine guidance in making it happen.

The third infinite thought is joy. This is the desire that every living being could have ultimate happiness, beyond even death—a happiness which never changes into sadness, a happiness which is based in serving all life, everywhere. And then the fourth thought is equanimity, where we wish all these things on all beings equally, regardless of whether they are someone we like, someone we dislike, or someone that we don't feel much for either way.]



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Homework master day two: *the eight limbs of yoga*

1) Perhaps the most famous teaching in the Yoga Sutra is the one about the eight limbs or steps of the yogic path. Give the well-known name for this group of eight. Then list each one of them separately, explaining briefly how it flows into the other, all with the goal of coming to a correct understanding of how things really work. Comment finally on what we can do with this understanding. (If you want extra credit, add the Sanskrit name for as many of these limbs as you can.)

[The eight limbs or steps of yoga are referred to as *ashtanga*, a term which is made up of two parts. *Ashta* in Sanskrit means *eight*, and *anga* means *limb* or *step*. Of course nowadays the word is associated with one style of yoga, but this is the wider and original meaning.]

Here are the eight, and how they flow towards helping us see how things really work—

(1) Self-control (Sanskrit: *yama*). Ethical guidelines that help us avoid hurting other people. These give us the foundation of good karma to be able to meditate well, reach higher understandings, and make a better world around us.

(2) Commitments (*niyama*). These are positive ethical guidelines—things we should be doing in our life to make good karma—as opposed to the guidelines of self-control, which are things we should avoid doing. And so they make the same good karma, with the same goals.

(3) Yoga poses (*asana*). The physical exercises of yoga; what we most often call “yoga” in the West. These are meant to strengthen and keep the body healthy for the rigors of meditation and higher practices. They also open the channels of the inner body, helping prana to flow, and assisting in higher realizations and the ultimate transformation of the body and mind.

(4) Control of the breath (*pranayama*). Our outer breath is connected with the movement of our inner winds, or prana, which are themselves connected to our state of mind. By controlling the breath then we control our peace of mind and prepare it for deep meditation, which we use to come to an understanding of how things really work.

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(5) Withdrawal of the senses (*pratyahara*). Our mind is continually running after stimulation—for example in the form of excessive food, sex, music or news, which can of course be enjoyed wisely and in healthy measure. If we are able to bring the mind inside at will, then we can begin to go into deep meditation, to reach that understanding.

(6) Focus (*dharana*). The ability to purposely hold our mind on one thing at a time. The first mental step to deep meditation.

(7) Fixation (*dhyana*). In the context of the Eight Limbs, the ability not just to hold our mind on one thing, but to hold it there for an increasing length of time—working up to hours in deep concentration. One more step towards deep meditation.

(8) Perfect meditation (*samadhi*). Deep meditation which has two important parts to it. One is the ability to meditate with perfect concentration for long periods of time. The other is the ability to turn this meditation upon the ultimate question of life, which is, again: How do things really work?

It's important to realize that this is the ultimate goal of all eight yoga practices. If we truly understand how things work, then we can reach any goal we want, whether it be something immediate like financial prosperity, a good relationship, or a strong body; or else the higher goals of helping to remove suffering in the world, and overcoming the forces of aging and death themselves.]

2) Self-control, or following a personal ethical code, is said to be the foundation for all yoga practice. What are the five guidelines which Master Patanjali mentions directly? As you list each of these, describe how he would comment on what we consider “grey areas” in the parts of this code. List finally an additional form of self-control that is assumed in India and Tibet to apply to this entire code.

[Here are five parts of the ethical code recommended in the Yoga Sutra:

(1) Protect life: never kill or harm another living being. This is called *ahimsa* (this is the correct pronunciation) in this part of the Sutra. This extends of course to animals, who are considered “persons” in Sanskrit, and who obviously do have feelings or we wouldn't spend billions of dollars every year on pet products. We need to remember that any pain or suffering which we cause to any living being will without any question absolutely come back to us. Of course we are learning nowadays that eating meat is moreover quite harmful to our body, and that a vegetarian diet makes us strong and healthy, with a clear conscience.

The ancient wisdom traditions of India and Tibet agree that life begins at the moment of conception, and that terminating a fetus at any stage is murder. We don't have to agree, but at least it's something to consider in making our decision about an abortion.

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At least talk to people who have been involved in abortions (women or men), and you will very likely find that they are still deeply disturbed and unhappy about it, whereas many of those who weren't planning on a child but who didn't feel comfortable having an abortion have learned that in many cases having a family is one of the deepest forms of a lifetime spiritual path.

It's also important to realize that actively supporting killing—as in the active support of a war, and failing to object to the war—is said in the Indian and Tibetan wisdom traditions to bring the same karma to us that it would if we were the actual soldier on the front lines who pulls the trigger and kills someone.

(2) Respect others' things: never steal. In Tibet this is called “taking what was not given,” and that pretty much sums it up. This is said to apply to an object of any value, even down to stealing a pen from work. Here are some perhaps unexpected areas to watch out for.

The possessions and money owned by a family are considered here to be held in common, and so to really respect others' things we need to ask our spouse especially before making any major expenditures. Paying taxes fully and properly is important for a yogi, because if we don't then we are actually stealing from every other person who pays taxes and has to pay extra to make up for what we don't give. It's also possible to steal from future generations, by stripping the world of resources that now won't be sufficient for those who come after us, and to steal by being insensitive to the needs of the other families of creatures who use the resources of this planet.

Many people also have a habit of abusing public property—say throwing litter on a road, or dirtying up a bathroom in a coffee shop—because somehow it is less obvious whose thing we are hurting, but again this is heavier karma because we are hurting something belonging to more people. This applies for example to something like making unauthorized phone calls at work; if we take a job and promise to work so many hours, we are stealing if we use this time otherwise.

Money accepted from others for “spiritual” services, which in many cases applies to yoga, has to be accounted for very carefully, since it is very heavy karmically. Again, it's important to keep in mind that when we take something from someone else, we are not actually gaining anything (that came from *giving* something to someone before, and the time gap thing is fooling us). Rather, we are guaranteeing that we ourselves will have financial problems later.

(3) Honor other people's relationships: don't engage in adultery. This primarily applies to cases where other people are in a committed relationship, and have not yet mutually given up that relationship. A simple rule of thumb given in the ancient books of wisdom is to never behave in any way towards a person's partner that you wouldn't do if their partner was there present at their side. A lot of people in the modern world have

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trouble finding or keeping a partner, and that all comes down to not respecting other people's partnerships day to day.

(4) Speak truthfully: don't lie. A lie is defined in the eastern wisdom traditions as purposely making any statement in a way where the person listening to you gets an impression which is not the same as the impression that you yourself have about that thing. Which can make telling the truth a real challenge! But we need to work towards this if we want people around us telling the truth to us.

(5) Live simply: avoid being possessive. Our mind has a limited storage capacity, the same as a computer. Every time we bring another thing home and put it in our house, or busy up our lives in other ways, one more part of this space gets filled, until we can't think straight or concentrate any more.

Think about how many pairs of shoes you have; think about what each of them looks like. The reason you can even do this is that a memory of each pair of shoes is taking up space in your mind. As a general rule, go through your house on a regular basis and throw out anything you haven't really used for the past six months.

A form of self-control which is always assumed in the eastern wisdom traditions is that we avoid using alcohol and drugs. The reason is that these substances lower the healthy inhibitions that we have: inhibitions that keep us from saying or doing things that would hurt others and ourselves. That is, these things very often lead us to break the other parts of our personal ethical code.

These things really are highly addictive, no matter how good we think our self-control is, and have ruined the lives of countless families and people who also thought they had enough self-control to handle them—not to mention the many thousands of innocent people who have been killed by drivers who drank too much.

Approach alcohol and drugs like a rattlesnake that will sooner or later give you a nasty bite. They are not just dangerous, but expensive, and damage the subtle body of a serious yogi or yogini. As Master Patanjali notes, there is a reason why each of these guidelines has been repeated throughout history, around the world, in all the great spiritual traditions. As we go through life, we begin to see the wisdom of a world where people don't hurt each other, even in small ways.]

3) Only two of the some 200 verses in the oldest book on yoga actually talk about physical yoga—about what we call “yoga” in the West. What are the three points that these verses give us about our yoga asanas, or poses?

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[In one of the more famous lines from the Yoga Sutra, Master Patanjali first says *Sthira sukham asanam*, which means, “The poses bring a feeling of well-being which stays with you.” The point here is first of all that, of course, we will feel better both physically and mentally if we maintain a regular practice of yoga.

But the feeling of well-being which the Master is talking about here is deeper than just that. This feeling is coming from the free flow of prana through the inner channels of the body, and therefore it has a special power. Because of the fact that our thoughts ride on our inner winds, or prana, we are able to have greater insights into important ideas when our yoga exercises have helped our prana to move properly, bringing on a feeling of well-being. That is, the feeling actually helps us think better, to have insights into how things really work.

Master Patanjali next says that the yoga poses utilize “a balance of effort and relaxation.” This balancing act is something that we’ll be continuing into our meditation practice, and can be compared to our hands on the wheel of a car, making constant adjustments left and right to stay in a straight line.

In the yoga poses, this translates into a middle way between trying too hard and not trying enough—between having the breath and mind fall out of rhythm, and not doing enough to get the inner channels to open.

And then finally the Master connects the poses to a balanced meditation. Here, “balanced” means free of the two extremes of thinking about what we’re going to have for lunch, and spacing out and not keep any alertness of mind. A feeling of well-being in the poses, maintained by a judicious balance of effort, leads to a balance or single-pointedness of mind, which we can then use to do the hard thinking it takes to see how the things around us really work. And this is the real goal of our physical yoga.]

4) What is some of the advice that Master Patanjali gives us about watching our breath? What is the final outcome of controlling our breath, and how is this reflected in our state of mind?

[Master Patanjali first says that we should keep a close watch on our breath. We will begin to notice the steps to a single breath: breathe out, pause slightly, breathe in, pause slightly. As we advance in our yoga, an emphasis is taken especially on the exhalation, assuring that it is long and fine.

We learn to count the breaths properly, beginning with the out-breath first, since this works against the natural process of death: instead of an out-breath ending life, we end each count of breath on the in-breath, asserting life—and bringing the world into us. As we advance into a yoga series such as that of Lady Niguma, then we begin to use the chakras to breathe, in specific places in the body, and in a specific order as we pass through the chakras.

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We learn to judge the duration of breath by using our heartbeats, and to go down past the levels of hearing the blood pass through our eardrums, and the breath pass the hairs in our nose.

Finally, as the Master himself puts it, “The breath is controlled when, as you remain there, the passing of your breath in and out simply stops.” We all know that when we are upset or angry, then our breath comes in sharp, uncontrolled pants and gasps. When we are at peace, contented, it passes in and out in a soft and gentle stream. Again this is a reflection of how the breath is connected to the inner prana, and this prana to our thoughts.

A very amazing and profound thought can actually slow the prana down to a stop. In turn then the breath stops. This is exactly what happens when we have deep, meditative insights into how things really work around us.]

5) What does Master Patanjali mean when he says that if we “turn the combined effort upon the sun,” we will “understand the earth”? And what does it mean to turn this effort upon the moon to see the stars? How finally does turning this effort upon the polestar lead us to an understanding of how things work? Frame your answer in the metaphor of an onion, and describe the final goal here.

[The “combined effort” is an important subject in the third of the four chapters of the Yoga Sutra. It refers to using the last three of the eight limbs of yoga together, in order to come to deep realizations of how things really work. With this, we can pretty much make anything happen in our life that we want—whether it’s mastering yoga poses, finding a relationship, or saving the world.

We’ll remember that the last three limbs are the ability to focus, or keep the mind on one thing; the skill of fixation, or keeping our concentration on this one thing over a long period of time; and then finally “perfect meditation,” where we turn these skills upon the higher questions of life.

Now the body has a total of 72,000 inner channels through which the prana flows. Three of these channels are by far the most important. Running down the center of our body, from the spot between our eyebrows, up under our skull, and then down just in front of the spine to the tip of our sexual organ, is what we call the “central channel,” or *sushumna* in Sanskrit.

It is sometimes referred to as the “polestar,” or North Star, because it is central to the entire structure of our inner body, like the axis around which the earth turns. This channel is about the width of a pencil, and colored like a golden red candle flame.

This channel is normally blocked, but when prana can flow even slightly through it, we enjoy high emotions and thoughts such as love, compassion, wisdom, and insight.

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What blocks the channel are two smaller channels that run parallel to the right and left of it. They cross over and around the central channel at spots and choke it.

The channel to the right is slightly smaller than the central channel and is colored a dull red. It is sometimes called the “sun” channel, and its common Sanskrit name is *pingala*. When prana flows through this channel, we feel thoughts of anger or dislike or of being upset. It is related to how we see the objects around us—things like a table, or a spoon.

The channel to the left is the same size, and is colored a milky white, which is reflected in its Sanskrit name, the *ida* channel. It is sometimes also called the “moon” channel. When prana flows through this channel, we feel thoughts of wanting, desire, possessiveness. It is related to how we experience subjects as opposed to objects; an example would be our own mind, or “me.”

The “earth” that Master Patanjali is talking about is the objects in the outer world around us, and the “stars” are the moments of awareness within our own mind. If we really understand how the channels work—if we turn our fixed focus upon them and use “perfect” meditation or insight—then we can understand both the things in the world and the senses with which we are aware of them. This pure understanding then would be related to prana flowing in the polestar, or the central channel.

Just what would this kind of understanding be like?

We can state it briefly using the traditional idea of the envelopes, or layers of the onion skin. Our being has layers in it, just like the layers of the skin of an onion. If we understand this onion of ourselves, then we can get a better idea of how things work, and make things happen in our lives that we want to happen.

Our gross physical body is one layer. It is fed by the next layer down, by food—not only french fries, but also our breathing, by oxygen. The layer below the breath is the prana, the inner breath, which flows much in tune with the outer breath. The prana is the place where body and mind interface, for it is physical but upon it ride our thoughts, which are the next layer down.

Not only outer things and events, but also our thoughts themselves occur in our mind according to our own karma—how well we have cared for others in the past—and this is the next level down. At the very center of an onion there is always a tiny empty space, and this is the final inner layer: emptiness. Emptiness simply means that nothing has anything *in* it except for what our own mental seeds make us see there.

On the very outside of the onion, like the brown skin on the outside, is the world around us, and the people who live in it, also forming around the same inner layers. If we really understand how all these layers work, then we can, as Master Patanjali says, work with our mental seeds in such a way that we achieve a “body of perfection...solid as a diamond itself”—a body made of light, with which we can serve countless living beings, all at the same time.]

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6) Master Patanjali, in the first chapter of the Yoga Sutra, describes a very fast, simple, and powerful optional way of achieving all our goals—better even than the entire eight-limb path of yoga. Explain, including the technique we use here.

[Master Patanjali says that a short cut for achieving all our goals is “to ask the Master for their blessing.” He is referring here to our own Heart Teacher, and to the crucial need to find this person during our lifetime.

We look, he says, for someone who is “untouched” by negative emotions, and who has figured out the secret of how things really work—someone who understands the seeds, and how they create our reality.

“Herein,” he says, referring to training in the hands of a truly great teacher, “lies, in the most excellent way of all, the seed for knowing all things.” As for how we relate to them, Master Patanjali says that great beings of the past have “never allowed themselves to be separated from this Master for any length of time.” We give all our time and attention to learning what our Heart Teacher has to teach us, and by so doing we help not only ourselves but the entire world.]



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Homework master day three: *near diamond*

1) What is Master Patanjali referring to in the lines from the first chapter of the Yoga Sutra when he says that “On that day, the seer comes to dwell within their own real nature,” and how does this relate to an idea called “emptiness”? What role do the last four of the eight limbs of the yogic path play in reaching this day? How does this connect to the “clear light” that the Master mentions further on, and the “path of the diamond” which he also mentions?

[We’ve been talking a lot about our wrong idea of how things work; thinking, for example, that an aspirin has something inside of it that “makes” it work. By thinking a lot about how obvious it is that aspirin *doesn’t* have any such thing (or else it would work all the time), we begin to gain an intellectual insight into how things really do work. With this, we begin to see that aspirin didn’t really have anything “inside” of it at all: whenever it does happen to work, there must be something coming from me that helps it do so.

The fact that aspirin *doesn’t* have anything inside of it that makes it work is sometimes—in the Yoga Sutra and elsewhere—called “emptiness.” This we hear this word a lot and sometimes get some wrong information about it. It doesn’t refer to simple nothingness or blackness, and it doesn’t refer to trying to think about nothing. It doesn’t mean that there’s no good or bad, no pain or no pleasure—it doesn’t mean that we’re supposed to pretend that we don’t care what happens to us.

What emptiness *does* mean is that the aspirin doesn’t have anything inside of it that isn’t coming from how we treat other people. We can understand this by thinking about it, but it’s a whole different thing if we can learn to see it directly, in deep meditation. It’s said that if we can see emptiness—which is in fact what “ultimate reality” means—then something changes deep within us forever.

First of all, we quickly gain the ability to stop within us every single negative thought we ever have. Imagine never being angry, or even upset, ever again—imagine being *incapable* of getting upset. Secondly, our mind and body begin to change. The mind opens, and we begin to gain the ability to see faraway times and places. The body changes, and we begin to gain a body of light with the ability to serve others in many places at the same time. This combination of mind and body is in fact what is “enlightenment.”

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All of this can only happen if we see emptiness, or ultimate reality, directly in a state of deep meditation. All the eight limbs of yoga help us get to this state, but let's look at how the last four especially help.

The first of these is the ability to withdraw from the objects of the senses—to put it simply, learning to simplify our life, and cut down on useless stimulation. This literally opens up space in our mind so that we can get quiet and focus on one thing, which is the next limb. With practice, this focus can go on for a longer and longer time, which is what the next limb of “fixation” refers to.

And then we can drop into a deep meditation, which is “perfect” when we can use it to see emptiness directly, which shoots us right to these higher goals. We're going to see how—obviously—learning how things really work will allow us to get anything in this world that we might want. But we don't have to stop there: there are the bigger questions, of how to stop suffering in the world, of how to overcome even death itself, that we can reach if we see directly how things really work.

This emptiness that helps us get there is sometimes called “clear light,” which is specifically a reference to how physical yoga can help us see emptiness. That is, when we are able to use the yoga asanas or poses to open up those channels and get the prana to flow freely, we have an experience of a clear river of light as our chakras open, which helps us gain ultimate love and a direct vision of the ultimate.

Sometimes emptiness is compared to a diamond, and seeing it is called the “way of the diamond.” This is because—when we do see emptiness directly—we feel an urge to compare it to something in the normal world, something that we can use to remember what we saw. And the closest thing, the nearest thing, is the diamond: something totally pure, ultimately hard, and so clear that if there were a wall of diamond around us we wouldn't even see it.]

2) What, according to Master Patanjali, causes the vast variety of objects that we see around us in the world? How do we use this fact to “load” our actions, in the metaphor of stapler? What worldly occupation does Master Patanjali use to describe how we will be spending the rest of our lives?

[The Master says that the great variety of things and people around us are products of what he calls “countless seeds” within our own mind. How this happens is that a person at work for example—our boss—exhibits a certain number of “markers” or “signs,” such as a loud voice or a certain facial configuration.

We have been yelling at people who work for us during the past few weeks, and this has planted seeds in our mind. When a seed ripens, it causes us to interpret the “markers” of our boss in a certain way. As the seed opens, the mind creates a tiny mental picture. It then lays this picture over the markers coming from our boss.

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Because we've been yelling at people, a picture of a yelling boss is laid over the markers or indicators of our boss's face. Almost everybody in the world takes the yelling boss then to be coming from the boss's own side—they blame the boss for being a yelling boss—and they fail to recognize how they themselves are creating him this way.

This way in which the seeds from our own deeds “fill in” the reality around us though is something that we can turn around to work for us, instead of against us. Here it's useful to be familiar with the metaphor of a stapler. If someone asks us if a certain stapler works or not, the first thing we have to do is open it up and see if it has any staples—if it's loaded or not.

And herein lies the secret of how things really work. Yoga will work to make us trim and strong if it's loaded, and if it's not we might very well hurt our neck or back. Aspirin will work for us if it's loaded, but only if it's loaded. And so it's not really the case that things don't work at all; things work, if they're loaded, and not if they're not. And some things are more likely to work, just because of the loading that's gone into them already—so help a person who's sick and then go do yoga, rather than sitting on a couch (which could also work, but takes a lot more loading).

In the opening lines of the fourth chapter, Master Patanjali sets us on our course for the rest of our life—the rest of our life with seeds. He says, “We must become as gardeners.” With what we know now, we see clearly the task before us: we can adjust every part of our reality, from that ten pounds we'd like to lose up to the situation in the Middle East, simply by planting the kinds of seeds we need for each detail of the future we'd like to have. We can summarize this gardening in a single sentence: “Whatever you want to see in your future, provide it first for someone else.”]

3) So we're on course for our new future; but this quest can be slowed down a lot if we still have a lot of old karmic seeds, many of which we don't even remember planting. But we have hope, because Master Patanjali tells us, “You will never have to pay those old debts back; not a single one.” That is, there are ways to pinpoint any karmic seed in our mind, no matter how old, and no matter how serious, and destroy it. As the Master says, “Sit down and work out the antidote.” What are the four steps of this antidote called; how do we describe each one of these steps; and which of them is by far the most important?

[We have certain negative seeds in our mind that we know about; that we remember planting—something we did in our past that we regret now, especially now that we know how the seeds work. And of course there are probably countless seeds that we don't remember planting. We know that we can garden our future world to be as we wish, but unless we take care of these old karmic seeds, which were planted earlier, they are going to block the progress of our new seeds, since seeds left to themselves will ripen in the order in which they were planted—like airplanes waiting on a runway to take off.

There are four practices, called the Four Powers, that we can use to actually reach in and stop the power of an old karmic seed:

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(1) The Power of the Foundation. When you have planted a karmic seed that you know could be a problem, immediately sit down and review what you know about how seeds are planted, and how they create the reality around you. Think about how this new bad seed is going to keep from you achieving your goal of doing something that we benefit everybody you know.

(2) The Power of Destruction. In the ancient literature, at this point they talk about the story of the three men sitting at the bar. They all order the same drink, and the bartender pours each of them a shot from the same bottle. They all make a toast and down their shots.

The first man immediately starts choking, and falls down dead on the ground. He is quickly followed by the second. Think of the regret that the third man feels at this exact moment for having drunk the same thing.

This feeling of regret—intelligent regret, where we understand that we have done something that is going to come back and hurt ourselves—is a calm and empowering realization that we can do something about the seed we planted, and not the paralysis that comes with guilt (for which there is no word in Tibetan or Sanskrit).

(3) The Power of Stopping. This is the “antidote” that Master Patanjali is talking about, and it is the most powerful of the powers—the one we would want to do if we only had time to do one of the four. This is very simply making a resolution that we won’t repeat the mistake that we made before.

In a case where we know what the mistake was, this is fairly straightforward. But in many cases we will have to do some detective work. This is where we have a problem in our life right now—let’s say that we aren’t getting paid much at our job. We know that what we did to have this happen to us now must have been something negative, and something similar—something to do with money. And so we assume that we have a seed in our mind that came from not helping out someone who really needed money in the past, and was looking to us for help.

The Power of Stopping then is to decide that we’re not going to do this sort of thing at all in the future. This decision is itself a unique karmic seed which defuses the power of the old seed: the old seed may stay in the mind, but it will never open.

If the thing that we did is a big thing, we can promise not to ever do it again; if it’s something that we tend to do frequently, like complaining to our spouse, then we can set a time limit in which we will watch ourselves carefully not to do the thing again: say for two days or something like that.

(4) The Power of a Makeup Activity

The fourth power is to make a decision to do a makeup activity to help stop the force of the old karmic seed. If for example we were involved in an abortion, then we can decide to volunteer once a week at a children’s hospital for some length of time.

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And so to summarize, any karmic seed from the past can be destroyed, just by making a sincere effort at these four powers, to the best that we can, even if it's not perfect.]

4) In a famous verse from the first chapter of his Yoga Sutra, Master Patanjali gives us a description about what a daily practice should consist of. Explain.

[First of all, a daily practice is the very foundation of all our success in this path of yoga. Progress is made by a habit of discipline, of working on ourselves slowly, a little bit every day. Master Patanjali gives us a nice explanation of what this daily practice should be like.

He says first that our practice “must be cultivated over an extended period of time.” Progress deep within our heart takes long and patient practice.

He then says that our practice should be “steady,” meaning that—in the case for example of meditating upon love—we should do a short meditation every day of the week, preferably at the same place and time, so we build up a habit. We don't make progress by making a huge long effort in a meditation session on Monday, and then not doing anything for the next three days. Better just 20 minutes a day each and every day.

But if we are using for example a meditation technique that doesn't really work, or which can work but is very slow—or if we try some spiritual methods that don't really address the bottom-line question of where things really come from—then even if we practice regularly we're not going to make any great progress. So we need to learn a real, authentic tradition from someone who is really well trained in it.

With these three requirements fulfilled, then, as the Master puts it, a “firm foundation is laid.”]

5) What does Master Patanjali describe as the result of regular study?

[In perhaps the most beautiful lines of the entire Sutra—and a good place to conclude our intensive study of this classic—the Master says that if we are able to follow a regular practice, then we can “come to be with the Angel of our deepest dreams.” This is sort of a Guardian Angel, who comes to us perhaps in a human form, disguising themselves as someone that we know (it could be a brother or sister, a child, a grandparent or schoolteacher, a partner).

It's important, in our theme of gardening, to understand how and why such a Guardian appears in our life. It's not an accident, and they are not someone that we can just go out and look for. They are—like everything else in our life—created by how we take care of others. If we make it just a regular part of our life to be helpful and considerate to everyone around us, then we plant a seed in our mind to actually meet a real Angel one day, as someone in our immediate life.

Were they a real Angel all along, and we just failed to recognize them for who they are? We don't need to think that way. It's perfectly possible that for as long as we had the lower karma to see them as a regular person, then they *were* a regular person. And now that we have

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improved our karmic seeds through our sincere practice of the eight-fold yogic path, they are an extraordinary person, because of our extraordinary seeds. They never were *really* one or the other: they are what our karma forces us to see them as.

The question then comes down to: would you rather be surrounded by Angels, or by normal people? Both are real, and both are possible, potential in all people. If we'd rather hang out with emanations of the divine, then all we need to do is be a little more amazingly helpful to those right around us who need us.]