

## Installing a New Operating System

### Part II

#### Internalizing the Yoga Sūtra Diagram by Practice: Patanjali's Great Meditation (Sanyama) on the Elements

I recently had an opportunity to do a presentation of our institute's learning model at a college, and feeling inspired after the positive response from faculty members, it suddenly struck me that the reason this learning model has worked so well and so consistently is that it is based on such solid principles, namely *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*. Patanjali distilled the essence of yoga, which in his time were rooted in an ancient tradition that was time tested. Centuries before the Yoga Sutras were written, Kṛṣṇa assures Arjuna who has acknowledged his own doubts about being able to regulate a turbulent mind:

asanāyama mahābāho mano durnigrahaṃ ca  
abhyāsenā tu kaunteya vairāgyaṃ ca gṛhyate

“No doubt, Arjuna, an active mind is hard to control,  
but by *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*, son of Kunti, it is held steady.”

Bhagavad Gītā

By relying on these principles whenever I taught, I could always expect excellent results. Not only would my mind be held steady but the mind of each student would be focused, because we set up agreements based upon the effort to hold a designated point of focus (*abhyāsa*) and the recognizing and letting go (*vairāgya*) of extraneous motives that pull one's attention from the point. As much as the results were based upon sound principles, they were based on the confidence I had that it worked. I saw it class after class. Seeing it work for others has given me the confidence that once teachers are trained in the model, it will work for them as well.

The confidence that something is going to work and keep on working is rein-

forced when you incorporate into it any discoveries that come along the way. The basic working model for the Sanskrit Training was in place nearly 20 years ago. Fine tunings have been made along the way based upon the responses and unique needs of students. The model is a flexible one that benefits from feedback. Like countless others I rediscovered the ancient model of yoga to be a simple structure of language that gives human beings a secure foundation for experience that is beyond the realm of what they know. In its application to learning Sanskrit, it prepares students and then gives them practice in learning something that most would find difficult to access by conventional approaches.

Patanjali's meditation or sanyama on the elements, or bhūta-jaya (mastery of the elements) works in precisely the same way as the model described above. But in addition to its foundation in abhyāsa-vairāgya, it offers a structure for delineating and navigating the subtle stages of meditation progressing from an ordinary waking consciousness through what would be the equivalent of dream states and deep sleep, without the loss of consciousness. Just like a map providing security that one can reach one's destination, although it's a previously unknown location, it is the structure and only the structure of the sanyama that makes it possible to venture into previously unknown inner territories. Just as a map consisting of named roads, geographical features and towns and cities along the way delineates a secure pathway as those names are recognized as actual locations, so proceeds the process of sanyama, by giving names - and this is where the Sanskrit language is so precious - to each phase of the progression, until you reach your goal.

Without the focus that a structure like that of the bhūta-jaya sanyama, the mastery of the elements, one's identity tends to default to a seemingly solid form consisting of the elements, which both modern science and ancient sacred teachings alike tell us is an appearance, a constantly changing dimension of reality, but by no means the whole of it. From Patanjali's perspective it is a starting point, whereby the elements one by one can be experienced

with single focus effortlessly created by a detailed description of the prominent characteristics, svarūpa, of each respective element and thereby become doorways to a progressively subtler experience. One begins within the body itself consisting of skeleton, tissue, water, air, electricity etc. Within the structure of each of these, there is a further progression from physical or sthūla, what can be known by the senses, to the subtle, sūkṣma, where one discovers within each element a spaciousness, a sense of space, inner space. Through the element air and the vehicle of the breath, inner space can be blended with surrounding space. This is the beginning of knowing profound dimensions of being, and Patanjali's sūtras provide indispensable language and insights for reaching this point and proceeding further.

### III.

The benefits alone of the bhūta-jaya sanyama, advertised by Patanjali himself are a great motivation for engaging in this practice and are the reason I originally entered into the practice: the perfect health of the body and imperviousness to anything inimical to it.

While this is a worthy goal, and I have experienced greatly improved health, it's just a starting point for the insights the bhuta-jaya can contribute to gaining precise understanding of the pathway Patanjali has spread before us in his four books of Yoga.

The bhuta-jaya meditation is a progression of five named stages, or practically, ways in which an element within the body such as the omnipresent water element can be used as a support for focusing and redistributing citta in way that induces calmness, sensitivity and a gradual progression towards a lucid sense of inner space as well as a transformation of the patterning of citta. Each of these is a sanyama, or a selecting of a single location (dhāraṇā) for citta, sustained (dhyāna) until citta is absorbed in only that (samādhi), as if actually taking the form of, in this case the element water. The following

illustration shows the conventional state of citta before meditation:

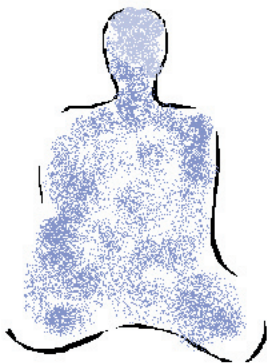
One's life force is blocked and inhibited by a knot of habitual thought patterns represented by the concentration of too much energy in the brain, while the life force is weak and faint in other locations:



The first of the five sanyamas is 1. sthūla - the physical or gross element (water). In this practice, it is the assigning of citta to the location of water in the body which is abundant everywhere except in the skeleton. The skeleton can be used as the earth element, a valuable sanyama, but a slightly more difficult practice. So here the first sanyama is to feel the omnipresence of water in the body, in all soft tissues, the circulatory system, the organs, the skin etc. This sanyama is as if giving a new definition to one's life and existence as an entirely internally experienced "water field". The second of the five sanyamas is 2. svarūpa, the essential nature, the unique identifying characteristics of the element. In practice it completes the first - sthūlā by flooding citta with

language and imagery that describes internally the feeling of water. Starting with the actual feeling of wetness in the mouth, and by description extending the feeling of lubrication to every soft tissue in the body right down to those little watery sacks, the very cells. The richer the language the deeper the absorption. This can include everything from wet to plump, juicy and succulent. It also can include inference - anumāna, something that Patanjali implies is in full use up to the very final stages of yoga meditation. While we can feel wetness in the mouth or throat, we're not really sensitive to the wetness everywhere, until something like the lips or skin becomes dry and uncomfortable. Whatever internal comfort there is due to the fact that it's wet. If there were no moisture left, no feeling would be possible. Visualize a mummy.

The beauty of this first stage of the practice, is that it begins right at home in the body, and it immediately redistributes and restores the balance of citta, evenly, homogeneously throughout the body.



The fact that the water element exists as much in the feet and the skin as in the brain and vice versa, makes this initial sanyama an incredibly effective way to equalize and harmonize system. Once the sanyama is achieved, there is the pleasure of feeling the organic rhythms of the organism progressing

effortlessly to a quieter state- the effort of language released (nirvitarkā)  
- before moving on to the next sanyama 3. sūkṣma, the subtle, the opening of  
inner space.