

Essay

Satchitananda

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Abstract

Satchitananda represents the trinity of absolute existence, absolute knowing and absolute bliss. These three attributes are inseparable at their natural level of being, the level we call nonlocality. Satchitananda observes the experience taking place within Prakrit and that the observation has no alteration on Satchitananda.

Keywords: Purusha, Satchitananda, Samapatti, nonlocality, life, evolution, God, Yoga.

The whole point of understanding how and why consciousness appears to rise in the brain can be said to come from what the various schools in the Hindu tradition call cognition. In making my explanation of my understanding of these traditions, I will use the diagram from Arya's book of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and some definitions from the Tarka Samgraha², a Primer of Indian Logic. In the latter book, the word buddhi stands for cognition, which is the cause of all verbal expressions. It is of two kinds, recollection and experience. It says that all cognitions other than recollection come under experience, and from that information I will seek to understand the process or processes involved in each.

From my experiences in Samapatti I know there are two distinct components in an experience. These are cognition as knowledge, and the creation of a samskara. The Tarka Samgraha says of buddhi that the word can be used in the sense of *Antahkarana*, the inner organ of knowledge. It is also used in the sense of determination, which is an aspect or modification of *Antahkarana* according to the traditions of Samkhyas and Advaitins. Above buddhi on the diagram is Mahat, the teacher within Akasha which I have referred to as the dispassionate observer. What Mahat observes is Prakriti, the substrate which is enabled as the manifestation of the three aspects of Purusha/Satchitananda, Existence, Knowing and Bliss.

What we need to keep in mind is that Satchitananda/Purusha observes the experience taking place within Prakriti, and that the observation has no alteration ('no distinguishing mark') on Satchitananda/Purusha. Satchitananda/Purusha's observation of Prakriti gives rise to the attributes of Existence, Knowing and Bliss on Prakriti at the level of Mahat. As we consider each level on the diagram it is evident that Mahat is also without modification by its observations of everything below it, including buddhi. More recently, some have taken Satchitananda/Purusha to be what is known as God, which is inconsistent with some of the early philosophies because the God theory holds that God knows and makes judgements. In Gautama's sutras God's

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causality is refuted in relation to material cause and effect and not to that of the agent, an instrumental cause, and from this I would say that any suggestion that God would consider moving a mountain is wrong.

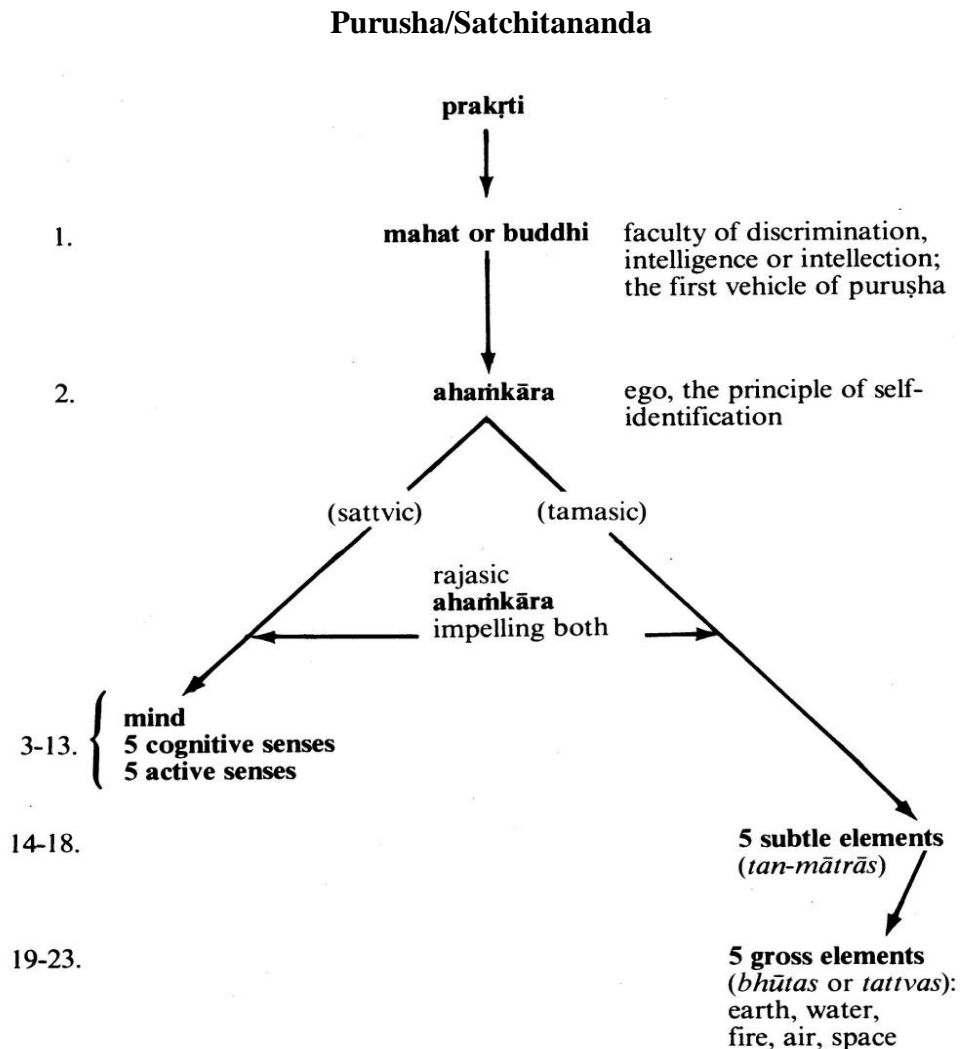


Fig. 1

At the very first step on the diagram Satchitananda/Purusha reflects on Prakriti for Mahat to emerge. Without Chit, there is no such thing as experience, and I am asserting that in my opinion reality transforms through these 23 steps as an expression of Satchitananda. Thus we can say that at every step Prakriti exists with the attributes of Satchitananda/Purusha as its fundamental. The reference above to ‘no distinguishing mark’ can therefore be taken as a logical understanding of the role of Mahat being one which does not create samskaras, therefore being the dispassionate observer. Patanjali also tells us that one who is established at the level of Mahat does not experience grief, which equates to not having the samskaras associated with a memory of having lost someone to death. Mahat, also known as the Greatest Teacher, exists as the first appearance

of intelligence because it contains information which can, under the right circumstances, become known.

I make that assertion based on the word, space, which we find at the very bottom of the diagram, and the fact that the experiences I have had in the state of Samapatti correspond to the descriptions of that state and the associated explanations from Patanjali. In respect of this space, Arya tells us that this is not ordinary space as we know it in the physical sense. It is a special space which contains information that can, under the appropriate circumstance, be known. Arya says the Sanskrit word for this space is Akasha, and is given the title of Mahat the Greatest Teacher. He also tells us that this is where matter becomes atomic.

This knowable information is what we call memory and to understand this we need to return to the earlier part of the exploration where I introduced the word, *Antahkarana*, the inner organ of knowledge. It is also called *manas* or mind. The Tarka Samgraha tells us that the individual soul, *atman*, is part of the substrate in which cognition inheres and is atomic and eternal. From this I conclude that atman is at the level of Mahat on the diagram. One's own soul or self is revealed in one's inner perceptual experience arising through the inner sense of mind, independently of the external senses, and is never presented by itself but only as the substratum of knowledge or consciousness, volitional effort, pleasure and pain and desire. So this explains the thoughts such 'I know', 'I am', 'I will' and so on as a personal or individual viewpoint we call self. Atman and manas are in contact with each other and function only within the sphere or the body with which they are associated. Manas or mind is able to be modified and the modifications are cognitive, volitional or emotional in form according to the circumstance at the time. We are also told that experience or cognition can only happen one at a time.

As both atman and manas are regarded as a substance, I am assuming substance to mean matter and the modifications to be changes in the nature of the substance or its structure. This leaves the possibility that in the case of a human being we are indeed talking about the brain. The neural network can have changes in the nature of the substance, for example as in the case of the neurotransmitters. It can also have changes in the structure as in the case of switching on or off individual or multiple synapses. With the modifications being related to cognitive, volitional or emotional activity within an experience, I believe this is one of the processes referred to at the start of the exploration. It would follow that a recollection of a cognition, a decision, or an emotion, would activate the corresponding neural conditions related to the cognition, decision or emotion being remembered.

Atman is the individual soul and the traditions tell us that there are many souls and that they are eternal. Manas is the expression of that soul within matter and it expresses through the samskaras as described in the previous paragraph. The samskaras expressed by manas exist in atman, and are therefore carried into a subsequent life, and this is part of the process of retained information being present at the level of Mahat. Of course, in Mahat that information is specific to a particular soul as an observation which, when a soul reincarnates is impressed as a samskara in the new manas. The samadhi state attained in a previous life can become present in the subsequent life into which a soul incarnates.

These modifications are called *samskaras* in the Sankhya tradition, and the goal of meditation is to bring the *samskaras* under control to have the person enter the state of *Samadhi*. When *Samadhi* is realised the mind becomes still and its activity ceases. However, awareness is still present and in that still state, one can focus on a question and the mind will know the answer directly, without any conflicting information such as beliefs, opinions, needs and prejudices. In the case of decision making this would be an ideal state in which to approach a decision. We have read of experiments in which there is a signal to make a decision or choice and some time later we become aware of the choice or decision. It may be that the time between the two events is the time taken for each option to be sampled one at a time within the neural network, and the outcome we become aware of is presented in the neural network as the choice which best fits the question. Alternatively, perhaps all related *samskaras* are set up, with the synapses triggered more often becoming capable of a stronger signal in the final network presented to Mahat to provide the outcome. At this point it is anyone's guess until that process is observed and understood.

A little earlier we referred to a further aspect of *Samadhi*; the absence of grief. Grief is a *samskara* related to the emotion associated with the loss of something or someone significant in one's life. As a person in *Samadhi* does not create *samskaras*, such a person would not create a *samskara* in that situation. The loss will still be present as a memory of that loss but it does not introduce the original state of neural network which represented the cognition at the time of that loss. I have mentioned this in earlier essays as being one of the two kinds of memory. For me, all of my memories are of this kind.

Finding Mahat at both the top and the bottom of the diagram, my second assumption is that the whole diagram is, in a modern context, set in *Akasha*, and from that assumption I would assert that *Akasha* is nonlocal. Therefore what the oral tradition of Sankhya in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* tells us is that *Akasha* contains knowable information and that it is a substrate of energy which has the potential for all matter. This potential for matter to become atomic extends across the whole diagram, finally evolving into the atomic state at the as the final evolute at the bottom of the diagram. From these starting assumptions we can explore the diagram to find what relevance it holds for life and for what we call consciousness.

We begin with this nonlocal state of energy with the potential for matter and information, and make the further assumption that for any of those potentials to be expressed as matter the energy state must be capable of manifestation, which is to say the energy must be active. I assume the nonlocal state to be around the Planck Length because the Sankhya tradition reminds us that the early rishis said that the smallest particle is simply a point without mass, which suggests that the energy within *Akasha*, this particular state we are exploring has the potentials to become matter. In that assumed nonlocal state there is little scope for the energy to do anything more than expand and contract by that dimension, which suggests an oscillation with a wavelength of around 10^{-33}cm or less right across the diagram, becoming atomic at a slightly longer wavelength. As matter, even at the level of atoms, is composed mainly of space, and given the size of an atom

in a general sense, that particular space can be regarded as Akasha. And since Akasha is inferred as being present across the whole diagram it would have the attributes of Satchitananda in any matter which evolved as real physical matter as a fundamental of all matter. It is worth noting that thought is real matter, and is non-physical state within Akasha.

I further assume that the shortest wavelength would be that of Mahat, while both mind and body (matter) as they present on the diagram would have wavelengths related to, or the same as Mahat. As this wavelength is, in terms of knowing (Chit), also across the whole diagram there is possibly no necessity for the wavelength to differ at all. And finally, I assume Bliss to be when the peaks of two waves coincide, this assumption being based on my experience of Bliss as a particularly visceral one which involves the whole body, possibly down to the cellular level. From these assumptions about Satchitananda as a fundamental of reality and therefore of consciousness as it applies to this diagram, we now move on to the question of how what we presently call consciousness can arise in the brain.

For these assumptions to have any relevance to the question of consciousness, we need to assume some form of life, and while it would be a simple step to assume a human being it will be more practical to assume a simple single celled form. I do this to show that whatever form we use the same principle would apply to any form, animal or vegetable. For the purpose of this exploration what we can assume about this environment is that there are a number of forms of life, that the environment is supportive of life, and that these forms have to process energy to survive. For an animal within such an environment, survival is a random process in which the predator is more likely to survive if it becomes more effective than the prey in recognising the other.

As relatively simple forms of just one cell, there is no brain to which we can assign this recognition role. Remember, at this point in evolution we cannot assume the normal five senses, but as a general assumption I would agree with Patanjali that sensory perception does exist as a potential. This gives the simple cell touch as a sense as it becomes aware of what changes within itself happen in any direct contact with its environment. In this instance I would assume touch to be coming from the cell membrane coming in contact with its environment if we accept a liquid environment.

The knowing aspect of Chit would experience that environment continuously and over time would recognise aspects of the environment and remember them. I say this as an analogy of what is known about cellular biology in the broadest sense. Therefore, life in this form would develop a capacity to learn. More importantly, since these simple cells reproduce by division it is not unthinkable that in the resultant two from one cell division the resulting two cells would retain that experience as a *samskara* which produced a memory, and over time a body of knowledge would be built incrementally, despite some cells being lost to successful predators. Of course, the same process would most likely be true for the predator as well, and a balance would evolve over time. But life never stands still and mutations would occur from these changes, and newer forms with different experiences, perhaps more cells and more options. All of this in the context of a process is really no different to the cognitive process we have today as humans.

From the perspective of retained experience this is only a beginning, and in the present now it would be foolish to ignore the likelihood that we are still operating in much the same mode. Our present day world demonstrates on a daily basis the repetition of our past. All of the experiences of those early lessons learned by our ancestors are present in all of us today as our Samskaras. The phrase, 'sins of the fathers' come to mind, literally. The really overt examples are so widespread they have effectively become hidden 'in plain sight'. As mankind evolved to the point of top predator we reorganised the lives of some of the prey and called that organised practice animal husbandry. Some time later, some of us took to raising crops to replace the hunter gatherer roles, and in the process found ways to store the grains we grew to use in the non-growing seasons. For the same reasons some 'lesser animals' store nuts for the winter.

These changes led to wealth for some and poverty for others, and that too replicates in the factional nature of our primate forebears, where survival was determined through relationship to the alpha male of the group. As these attributes of our primate ancestors were their samskaras, they have been carried on through our evolutionary line, and apart from advances in technology we are not all that different. We still have that alpha male latent in all of us and we negotiate our way through life with the same basic strategies of our single celled memories. The alpha male samskara is still a dominant feature of modern mankind, even in our myriad religions where God is assumed to be male. Unfortunately, the same alpha male desire to dominate through unreasonable force has escalated in proportion to the population growth, which itself has led to a higher concentration of wealth in a dominant few. At every step man seems to have the male God as the justification for all of the violence and of wealth, not as something we are even aware of but as an underlying part of who we have become. God is our most significant samskara, and like the minor females in a group of primates, our women are dominated by variations of the same samskara to a major extent by males, some of whom will never achieve dominance anywhere else in their lives. There is not much prospect of meaningful change without first coming to grips with these fundamental samskaras.

A point often missed by those seeking to achieve a more equal distribution of access to the common wealth of providence if such a thing exists, is that in the whole reality of life it is a fundamental that life preys on life as its source of food. Our food animals as well as we humans all consume vegetation, (life and energy) which is converted into life and energy at every point in the food chain. One can choose to eat only vegetation but this does not confer any significant moral standing. The same is true of financial wealth. Wealth is like any other samskara, and as such it sets up a self-perpetuating mind set which one can address if that is her/his choice. For all of us it is about "So many samskaras, so little time".

Conclusion

So there it is, my thoughts about consciousness arising in the brain. It is all about experience as something sensed or as a cognition, which produces a samskara; an impression on the mind of the experience and the observation of the experience as a cognition. Needless to say then is the fact that when a current thought connects to part of an earlier experience we will have an

awareness of that experience and it will be made conscious via the neural networks, our reprogrammable web of samskaras. How could it be otherwise, since our entire memory has conscious, physical, and emotional awareness as active components of the samskaras that set those memories in both Mahat and atman in the first place?

The Hindu traditions vary to some degree and to a novice like me that has been frustrating as well as confusing at times. But no more so when I look at the confusion as being very much like the confusion older people like me encounter when I read the instructions supplied with any piece of today's technology. They have obviously been written by someone well versed in the technology, someone who has no idea how old people brought up on earlier technology can be expected to follow the text with the same understanding as the writer. So looking back on what I have written here, thoughts will continue to surface and most of it will not be understood.

Thoughts for instance about why mention atman and not mention thoughts about the early life forms too in the same model of consciousness. If we do believe in the notion of evolution then surely those early cellular forms must have created samskaras too if the model is at all valid. So atman would have its equivalent in those forms too. And logically, this would infer that there must be an equivalent DNA structure for those early cells just as there is a DNA code for today's cells such as those that indicate a species. Taking this a little further, whether a DNA code relates to cellness or humanness, something along those lines would suggest to me that just as species evolve, the souls would also evolve with both time and experience. An interesting thought perhaps, but not the last word. Taking living matter as a whole, evolution suggests to me that we cannot honestly avoid the relatedness of all life. And looking at that whole rather than take the anthropocentric viewpoint it seems to me that within the whole there is a discord which we call the present state of the world. And that overall whole is, apart from us, in a relatively stable state while we humans are in turmoil.

The presumption of being made in God's image is unsustainable, as is the notion of he/she/it being able to set things back on an even keel because there are too many versions of what an even keel might be. We have become the dominant monoculture, with an attendant rise in diseases, especially in the way we have come to think. It is quite possible that the ancient ones have already told us what we need to know; we still need to make the leap into really understanding what they were saying.

So here is my leap, and in making this leap I am satisfying my earlier thought that any theory of how consciousness arises in the brain would have to take into account the earlier forms of life. By that I am saying that since we accept Darwin's theory of evolution we should also accept that what the Vedic cultures said about consciousness must follow the same evolutionary process. From my first essays to my last I have used the terms Mahat, the Dispassionate Observer, Mind and Samskaras. I have blithely asserted that mind is distinct from Mahat, and probably other seemingly outrageous points, and now it is time I offered some plausible explanations to support it.

Returning to the simple cell and to the notion of nonlocality it should be evident that any simple form will have many points which are less than the Planck Length, and let us say the number is one million. Each of those points has the qualities of Satchitananda, and while that might sound like a recipe for confusion each point is observing simultaneously, which gives us what would effectively be a single observation at the level of Mahat on the diagram. This single observer is what is called atman in the case of human form; we also call it soul.

Another way of looking at this problem would be to consider Akasha as an endless field of pixels in some infinite television screen, each pixel having the attributes of Satchitananda. A story being played out on that screen, so far as the circuitry and software facilitating the story is essentially factual, just like the information within Mahat. The information within the picture on the screen, so far as a person acting in that story is concerned, is a display of the actor's experience, and we call that soul. When the actor has completed acting that role she or he remembers the role, but what we didn't realise is that the memory exists within the pixels activated during the experience. In recalling that experience at some place or other, person's local pixels will activate her/his samskaras to reproduce the memory of that experience.

It is also the case that an entirely different person who walks into the same physical space where that story was acted will, under the right circumstances, feel some of that experience experientially. Sometimes we call that psychic, other times we say it is déjà vu.

References

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