

Essay

On Consciousness & Vedic Science

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Abstract

The essays I have written on the subject of consciousness have been a record of my personal effort to understand my experiences as a healer. By putting these experiences down as specific documents for others to assess has been a challenge, not just for me but also for anyone who might read them. In retrospect I can see that part of the difficulty for a reader would have been the repetition of my description of my Samapatti experiences. I admit all of that repetition has been tedious but now, after years of that repetition we have reached a point where I do have a reasonably clear understanding of what the people who wrote the Vedas were talking about so far as consciousness is concerned. Consciousness has been a thorn in the side for western minds ever since the Greeks found philosophy as a means to understand reality and mankind's place in the apparent scheme of things. The question of consciousness has been an integral part of my thorn in seeking to understand my Samapatti experiences, chiefly due to not having heard of Samapatti at that starting point. It has only been through writing what I found as I sought understanding that I encountered my own questions and the answers came along in their own good time.

Keywords: Purusha, Satchitananda, Yoga diagram, perception, Samapatti, Asamprajnata samadhi, born that way, Siddhi, samskara, atman, soul.

The Yoga diagram

The diagram, Fig. 1, is based on Usharbuddh Arya's book, *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*¹ and the Sankhya philosophy, and it has been fundamental to having an understanding of how the people know and think within the Vedic tradition generally and in the Sankhya tradition more particularly. What we really need to understand is that their knowledge is considerably deeper than the western viewpoint; up to a point of being more aligned with the recent science of quantum theory and the standard model of physics.

The two words above the diagram, Purusha/Satchitananda are placed above to indicate being separate from the reality we call physical, which is all of what is contained in the figure itself. This is a bit misleading for most of us because the second word, Satchitananda is the fundamental of the whole figure. Prakriti is the physical reality, both real and in potential, therefore it is both the substrate and whatever manifests from that substrate. Satchitananda as a word represents the three fundamental aspects of reality; Sat means existence, Chit means

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knowing, and Ananda means bliss. The next significant word is Mahat, which means the greatest teacher. The last word at the bottom of the diagram is space; not space in a physical sense but a particular kind of space which contains all information. This space is called Akasha and is also called Mahat, the greatest teacher. It follows that the greatest teacher has access to all information and for that reason the two words are synonymous. What is most important for this summary is the fact that Satchitananda, as the fundamental of the whole, is present throughout the whole diagram and therefore throughout the whole reality. The same is true of Mahat/Akasha. I will refer to the diagram throughout the summary as and when it is relevant to the particular point under consideration.

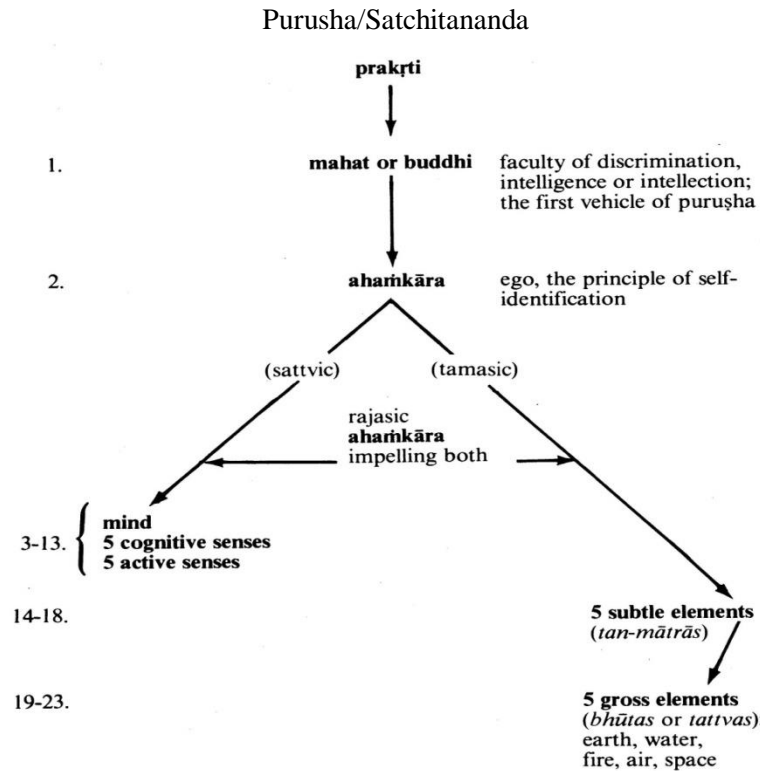


Fig. 1

Summary

The whole reality as we perceive it is a continuum of space, matter, and time, the operative word being perceive. Most of us are aware that we perceive through the five senses (3-13 on the diagram) and have built all of our knowledge on that basis. The Vedic knowledge is based on a different kind of knowing which has been built on what they call direct experience (DE). It is a bit more complicated that the direct knowledge that comes from physically doing something. It all comes from being in a state of Samadhi, and in particular, Asamprajnata Samadhi, and the knowledge or skill achieved in that state is called a Siddhi. The Samadhi state is one in which the mind is still or empty, and the asamprajnata samadhi state comes from diligent study and meditation over many years under the guidance of an accredited teacher. The proof of this model of reality, especially the proof of the direct experience in the Samadhi state, comes from

replicating what one person finds in the Samadhi state against what another person finds in that same state. It is through this replicating process that a teacher monitors the progress of a student. The definition of how one attains the Samadhi state is also a proof of the establishment of that state. For example, the state of Samapatti is only available to one who is in the asamprajnata form of Samadhi.

So this is the first point so far as my Samapatti experiences are concerned, because I have not had been on that diligent study and meditation pathway. I have simply been born that way, and the Vedic tradition says that *'being born that way'* means that this particular Siddhi was acquired by a student of all of that study and meditation at some point in the past. And logically, this infers that skill and experience which was gained in life had survived after the death of that particular student. This does indeed pose serious questions for professional philosophers and for scientists. The next point must surely be the question of how can that skill and experience be retained?

Initially, we can approach the second point from my Samapatti experiences because these experiences have shown that in that state the seer perceives the content of the subject's mind, for example physical pain. I found that I experienced the subject's pain while the subject experienced my empty mind and no pain. At the same time, I was aware of both experiences and could differentiate between each one. From this Samapatti experience we can say that the content of the seer's mind and that of the subject's mind are obviously distinct and separate. We can also see that the seer perceives each of these minds and can differentiate one from the other. The question has now become who or what is doing this differentiating because we now have three viewpoints?

Setting that last question aside for a moment we need to recall the SCIGOD article by Hari² in which she tells us that mind is really synonymous of the memory in a computer, and from that realisation we can say that whatever we have in mind as a thought is really a memory. We can take that a little further with a bit of logic and say that every thought in any given moment is a response to the previous moment, which may have been a thought, a question or an experience. Returning to the Samapatti experience in question, and taking the subject's experience we find that the subject's mind has noticed the absence or reduction in the previous moment's experience of pain and notice of the mind being quiet or still. Now considering the seer's mind experiencing the subject's pain in the context of mind it becomes obvious that the seer's mind has used the content of the subject's memory to create the experience of the subject's pain. What we are left with as part of the question is the matter of what or who is doing the differentiation between the two because it appears to be an entirely independent viewpoint, and it requires the Yoga diagram to help resolve the question of the viewpoints. Mahat is the answer to that question, and in particular the Chit (knowing) aspect of Satchitananda.

In my recent Essay 3 I suggested that a specific cognition arises in the mind from a specific samskara which had created that specific memory. We become aware of the specific samskara when its specific neural correlates are activated within the brain and the nervous system. Looking back on the Samapatti experience to answer our three questions we find that the subject's pain came from the original experience of that pain which is sustained by its specific samskara having activated the brain's neural correlates associated with the original experience.

Since Akasha, and therefore Mahat, contains all information, it follows that the experience is known at the level of the individual's physical body/brain and at the level of Mahat. It also follows that the physical experience retained as a samskara is also retained at the level of Mahat and the brain. The same is true of the seer's experience of an empty mind as well as the seer's experience of the subject's pain. And since Chit is the knowing aspect of the whole Satchitananda we can say Mahat knows all three experiences. The fact that the seer is aware of the distinction between each of the other two experiences means that the seer's mind is operating at the level of Mahat. The reason for this is that the seer has achieved the Siddhi called asamprajnata samadhi, in which state this particular Samadhi is said to have become 'established', as distinct from the lesser samadhi we enter through meditation.

In other sections of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali we find the word, atman which in western terms means the soul. We find that atman is another word for mind, and therefore it is subject to modification by an experience, so in simple terms the soul has samskaras. This relates to the first point of the summary where the samskara of being in asamprajnata was mentioned as having been established by someone in an earlier life. This means that samskaras are what is retained from a life; it is beyond the life in which the samskara modified the record of that particular person's life on its soul, and from what we know at this point in the summary the record of the soul resides at the level of Mahat.

The word Purusha at the top of the diagram means God in a western context, and unlike the rest of the same context of that word Patanjali says that although Purusha is in the presence of an experience, that experience does not create a samskara. In the words used by Arya, any observation made by Purusha leaves no distinguishing mark. I assume that the same is true for Satchitananda and for Mahat, which is a reflection of Satchitananda. This characteristic of 'no distinguishing mark' is why my memory of an experience, which when it happened was visceral as well as emotional, the memory is only the observation that 'this happened'. It also explains why Patanjali tells us that a person in that state does not have any grief.

This last point about the memory at the level of Mahat is important because it is one of those times when one is aware of an observation made at the level of Mahat. Please note that Mahat is not someone ethereal, it is a state of the awareness of Chit at that level of the whole reality. And it is the reason I have referred to Mahat in some of my other work as the Detached Observer. At this point we need to examine the notion that this detached observer is everywhere and is timeless as in the context of information being retained beyond a lifetime.

Arya also says that the smallest particle (in a scientific sense of the word) is merely a point without mass.

In a sense of today's standard model of physics a point without mass is a reasonably close description of a sub-atomic particle. Arya also says at a conjunction of a number of points without mass, a point with mass can occur. It is not too far a stretch of the imagination to see some similarity between sub-atomic particles with mass emerging from 'the background' of a notional Higgs Field together with a Higgs particle. So what else does Yoga have to say about this 'background'? The Sat aspect of Akasha is existence of a state with the potential for everything, a state without any definition of time or space since the samskara of an experience

can exist across time and, presumably across space. To my mind, this sounds like the sub-atomic state. Science can set up the entanglement of photons, say two photons.

When a measurement is made on one of the pair the effect of the measurement is apparent on the other photon, irrespective of the distance between them. If we apply this example to the Yoga diagram it sounds exactly like the Samapatti model. The seer at the level of Mahat has made an observation of both the seer and the subject. Since the seer is at the level of Mahat the seer will know the state of both and since the subject feels the seer's stillness of mind while the seer knows both the subject's pain as well as Mahat's observation of both the seer and the subject it is reasonable to say all three are entangled. If we can have entanglement between matter (a mind at a particular state of awareness) and Mahat we can say that Mahat must be nonlocal in the scientific sense of that word. It may even satisfy those of a philosophical bent. That satisfies the space part of the picture; I don't know the correct expression for non-time but it is evident that experience as a physical effect, in the case of the modification of a mind, is retained across time and space. We can run this entanglement model of memory against a living system such as a simple cell as an analogy of time around the earliest appearance of life.

As an example we take a cell as a simple form of life and we assume that cell has a membrane. We also assume this form replicates by physical self-division, which means there will be a large number of these cells at any one moment and they are all essentially the same cell. In its life the cell will experience its environment, assumedly through touch, and each interaction will be retained by its memory which is contained in every nonlocal substrate of its material form. In other words, the cell's memory exists at the level of Mahat and it has a mind/soul.

Therefore each cell has the aspects of Satchitananda, and any self-organising function stems from its mind. From science this substrate is the subatomic particles making up the matter in the cell, including its membrane. Each of these particles is entangled with Mahat and thus the cell accumulates experience. If it recognises the matter in its environment as food it consumes that matter. If it encounters a predator and is itself eaten, that death is still recorded because the cell's parts are still entangled with Mahat. Moreover, when a cell divides, those parts are still entangled with Mahat. Thus, from the earliest appearance of life there was memory.

Moving on to evolution the same model will apply, although we will need to consider the knowing aspect of Chit within every particle of the life form and of its memory in Mahat. As Mahat is observing all of the cells simultaneously it has a whole of species as well as individual viewpoint. It will also have a whole of environment viewpoint. If the environment or an individual cell form is in decline Mahat can alter the responses of a cell, and of any part of the environment. There are many versions of souls in all of the life forms within an environment and this gives some scope for variation of individual responses, and the diversity provides an avenue for change. This of course provides more variables, and the changes can emerge; we call these changes adaptation. In modern times some of the individual responses appear to happen spontaneously from within a cell and this has been called self-organisation.

From my perspective, at least from my reflection of my own journey to understand, the path has been driven by the simple question of how does this all work? The question originated when my youngest son developed cancer at the age of 11 months. I am sure that at the cellular level there

may not be the same degree of awareness which we call consciousness, but the need to survive must surely be a fundamental samskara which, when entangled with Mahat, could change the response mechanism or chemistry. If that is so, then the model remains the same as it was way back then. It is possibly the same model right across the universe. The question of whether one needs a Purusha/God is not particularly relevant or important. We are indeed one small part of a far greater whole.

References

1. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. Ushar buddh Arya.
2. Hari, S. (2015), Concepts in Vedanta applicable to explanation of consciousness. *Scientific God Journal*, 6(5): pp. 167-178.