

Article

Consciousness, Lack of Imagination & Samapatti

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ABSTRACT

Let me say from the outset that in all of the material written on the issue of consciousness I have found little, if anything at all, about the presence of imagination and what part it might play in a discourse about consciousness. In view of the ubiquitous nature of imagination, at least for most people, this is hardly surprising. For people like me, lacking that faculty, it is quite a different story. Over a lifetime trying to understand why most people find the way I think a bit odd, autistic even, I have had to find my own answers, only to find that what the absence of an imagination can provide as an answer for me just deepens the puzzle.

Key Words: consciousness, imagination, Samapatti, Yoga Sutras, Patanjali

Introduction

It is obvious from the thrust of articles in this journal that almost everyone approaches the issue of consciousness from a scientific viewpoint, and I agree this is a reasonable stand to take. The problem arises when a different view is offered; what we agree to allow as science is going to exclude any information outside of the accepted concepts already explored. Having spent the past thirty years seeking answers, and being mindful of my lack of any of the science and mathematics currently being brought to bear on the subject, I have decided to simply say how the observation of reality without the benefit (or not) of an imagination appears for me, and the risks and abilities this condition bestows.

People who know me have found that I can only think simplistically, they know I don't plan anything and, in discussions, appear to think via leaps rather than a reasoned process. For me there is no gap between question and answer. I cannot form mental images of anything or do 'imagine a time when' sort of exercises. On the other hand, most will also say I am relaxed in situations other find stressful because I don't extrapolate issues into threats. Things only began to fall into place when friends sought me out for that very calmness they lacked and I began to question why.

In those one-on-one situations I found myself feeling their pain and, surprisingly, they felt my stillness, thus alleviating their pain. We also found that some would 'see' mentally what I had thought without any imagery. In one instance a woman asked me to help her disturbed cat; it was antisocial and hadn't washed itself for a year. Yes, it did smell a bit. I sat the cat on my lap and focused on my stillness. The cat went to sleep and I had chaotic visual images, a bit like multiple auras of migraine. The chaos cleared to become a garden scene viewed from cat eye-level. The plants appeared to be very large and the colours were just shades of brown, yellow and red. After a while I felt the cat would wake up. It woke and began to

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wash itself. Naturally I was a little surprised and facing even more questions.

I will leave it to any of the scientists in the room to make a note of the questions arising from that last paragraph. What it did for me was lead me to the science in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, and I know the same material is available through the many Indian cultures and systems of belief. Patanjali describes this blending of minds as Samapatti in Yoga Sutra 1.41. I also found another resonance in Yoga Sutra 1.11, which describes two kinds of memory.

I have watched many TV documentaries on the advances in brain science and applaud these obvious gains in our understanding of this fascinating subject. I also note that so far imagination has not been given much investigation in these documentaries, most probably because it is more associated with creativity and other deliberate thought processes. My view is that imagination is not always a deliberate or voluntary process.

One aspect of this condition is that I feel little in the way of grief. Some ten years ago I was called to the bedside of my eldest daughter who was comatose, having rejected a heart and lungs transplant she received five years earlier. When I sat beside the bed in a room filled with grieving family and friends I went into a state of intense bliss as soon as I looked at her beautiful face. The bliss was obvious to everyone in the room and I was not very popular in that moment. The bliss stayed with me for a week or more. The point here is that afterwards, on remembering that event, I have only a narrative of the time and place; there is no accompanying bliss. This is the same for all of my memories. I believe that the re-experiencing of emotion when remembering an event such as I have just described would have to involve some neural process, and in my case, that process must be missing. It is my view that having an example of something missing in comparison to the general population should raise a few questions for some research. It has done so for me and now I will try to apply the Hindu science to my idea of the questions.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

The whole of the Yoga Sutras, along with other Hindu disciplines, are directed toward achieving control over the mind. What this means is that we need to overcome the modifications of the mind, and what modifies the mind is the inputs it receives through experience and through thought. The final goal is the state of Samadhi, where the mind is under control of the observer, Self. The recommended method of how this can be achieved is meditation. I quote from *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* by Pandit Usharbudh Arya, Published by The Himalayan Institute.

Yoga Sutra 1.41 states that when one's modifications have subsided, his (mind's) stability on and coalescence with the apprehender, the process and instrumentation of apprehension and the objects of apprehension, like pure crystal (which takes on the reflection and colour of proximate objects), is called Samapatti.

Yoga Sutra 1.11 states that objects experienced not being lost is the modification called memory.

In commentary the question is asked; does the mind-field remember the cognition or the object of experience, and answers with the following. "A cognition is associated with and coloured by the object of apprehension and resembles and manifests the features of both the object apprehended and the process and instrument of apprehension. Such cognition then

produces an imprint (modification) that is similar to both. That modification (also called samskara) then manifests its identity with its own manifestative cause; it generates a memory. This memory is identical in form to the same (samskara, its manifested identity, and the manifestative cause). It consists of both the object apprehended and the process and instrument of apprehension.” And continues

“There, when the process and instrument of apprehension is the primary feature, it is intelligence (buddhi). When the form of the object of experience is primary, it becomes memory. This memory is of two kinds: (a) where something imaginary is remembered, and (b) where something not imaginary is remembered. All these modifications consist of pleasure, pain and stupefaction.”

Let me unpack these passages with a few explanations.

Apprehender is the reflection of purusha (pure consciousness) on the material state both real and in potential. On the Yoga diagram from the first issue of JCER this is called Mahat or Buddhi. It is the first field of discrimination and intelligence. It is the agent of pure consciousness, sometimes called atman.

The process and instrument of apprehension are the senses and their neural processes. This clearly refers to the mind’s observation of the object as well as the physical processes employed by the mind in reconstructing the object being remembered. In the process anything related to the object in the individual’s experiences will be available to the mind. The formation of this extended body of information is, I suggest, what we call imagination, although not imagination as a deliberate act.

The object of apprehension is what is being remembered in the case of memory, and the subject being observed by the seer (the cat in the Introduction) in Samapatti.

Patanjali uses the term, ‘being in the presence of’ throughout the Sutras and it is effectively stating that Samapatti is the process through which pure consciousness observes events in the material world. Thus Buddhi has the capacity for intelligence and consciousness because it is in the presence of purusha. Mind has the capacity of intelligence and consciousness because it is in the presence of Buddhi. Pure consciousness is ‘without distinguishing mark’ and this is also true of Buddhi for that same reason. Mind on the other hand is ‘with distinguishing mark’ in the form of samskaras, which generate a constant stream of thought through involuntary imagination.

Mind is also in the presence of the body, and because it identifies with that particular body it also identifies with the body’s experiences and its sensory system involved in those experiences. The interaction of the mind’s evaluation of an experience (samskaras) gives rise to the physical activity we call emotion. Having identified with an experience the mind can be said to have created the emotion which arises with that experience, which is why a memory can evoke an emotion.

The fact of Samapatti can be taken as valid in the light of my experiences in healing. It also follows that the requirement for Samapatti to be present has been met. Unless I have something to say or do then my mind is empty, and since I have not ‘learned’ this quietness of mind the conclusion I have drawn is that I do not imagine. I just happen to have been born this way. Most people find their mind is always active and that is what they seek to control through meditation.

My assertion here is that involuntary imagination is the normal state of a mind, driven by the mind's need to be vigilant for any number of reasons.

Returning to the matter of lacking the feeling of bliss when I recall that time in the presence of my dying daughter, it can be said that my conscious awareness of that event takes form at the level of *Buddhi* on the Yoga diagram. The bliss experienced at the time was both visceral and euphoric because it was experienced as a physical event in my life. The fact of its absence as a 'normal' memory suggests that it has not generated a *samskara* and therefore my mind remains empty except for a narrative of the event from the perspective of a detached observer.

Samapatti

I have been thinking about what *Samapatti* can tell us and especially the relatedness to the two kinds of memory. I feel sure my ideas will hold from a *Sankhya* perspective as well as from that of *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*. How one expresses any of this mathematically is up to one's choice. In the 'normal' kind of memory the object being remembered is primary, while the process and the instrument of apprehension are secondary. I believe the primary/secondary points relate to what is in the mind. In other words we are aware of the object when it is the primary component of a memory.

I think the process of apprehension is the creation of a *samskara* = a modification of the mind. What that means is that the individual will have the same response at that which first initiated the *samskaras* and so the object returns to our mind. The same is true of the object is an event containing an emotion; the same emotion is generated by the memory.

The instrument of apprehension, I believe, is *Buddhi* which is the source of the intelligence related to the event. In the 'second' kind of memory the object is secondary while the process and the instrument of apprehension are primary. Where this differs from the first is that the object or event is known. There is no response similar to the first occasion because a *samskara* was not created. This just leaves the intelligence contained in *Buddhi's* observation of the first event.

My assumption about *Buddhi* is that its intelligence derives from 'a spark of *purusha*' and, bearing in mind that *Patanjali* tells us *purusha* is a reflection of *Purusha* (pure consciousness) within *Prakriti* I have assumed that, like *Purusha*, *purusha* is 'without distinguishing mark'. Thus, I am saying the same can be said of *Buddhi* and therefore this is why there are no *samskaras* which are, after all, the distinguishing mark (modification) on Mind. Since the process and instrument of apprehension are part of the description of *Samapatti* it is fair to say that once again, the intelligence acquired by the seer is *Buddhi's* observation. This is also why the seer knows that the condition of the subject, be that pain or whatever, is not his (the seer's) pain or condition. For the subject, the stillness of the seer becomes a *samskara* and, with repeated 'doses' may offset the subject's focus on her/his condition. We can call that a form of healing if only because of the benefit for the subject.

I expect the diagram will be a bit difficult but, with some questions I may be able to explain it:

A simplified Yoga Diagram

The 'normal situation'

PURUSHA

No distinguishing Mark

All knowing

In the presence of Purusha

purusha



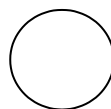
no distinguishing mark

A 'spark' of Purusha

Possesses intelligence

In the presence of purusha

Buddhi



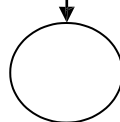
Faculty of discrimination

Observes

First appearance of intellection

In the presence of Mind

I am the context developed by mind



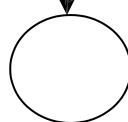
Through imagination and experience

I know/thoughts/samskaras

Mind

In the presence of Body

Body



I act and experience/respond

The situation without the faculty of imagination

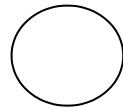
PURUSHA

No distinguishing Mark

All knowing

In the presence of Purusha

purusha



no distinguishing mark

A 'spark' of Purusha

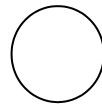
Possesses intelligence

In the presence of purusha

Buddhi

No distinguishing mark

Faculty of discrimination



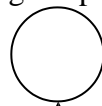
Observes

First appearance of intellection

In the presence of Mind

I am the context developed by mind through experience

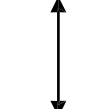
Mind



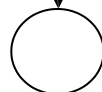
I know/thoughts/samskaras

In the presence of Body

Body



I act and experience/respond



Conclusion

I realize that what I have written may appear different to the general discussions about consciousness, and I do not claim any of the spiritual attributes of those who come to the Samadhi state through disciplined study diligent practice. I am simply offering these observations of my experiences as a validation of the knowledge given in many Hindu disciplines in the hope that they may shed some light on the complex processes of memory. Memory is not just a matter of storing information within a neural network. It involves

presenting the information related to an experience in many related contexts in terms of past experience as well as one's sense of who I am and what my hopes and aspirations at any moment might be.

The late David Bohm said that all matter contains all information. I would say that before matter there is information, Bohm's Implicate Order. Every form of life will have experiences, memory and samskaras. The same information in Bohm's Implicate Order will have an influence on each form in accordance with its needs. The responses will appear to be different from specie to specie but in the long run we are all running our different applications on the same operating system. In the same way, what I have written can be interpreted into mathematical and scientific forms to find some sense of it.

I realize that expressing this condition as a lack of conventional imagination is a difficult concept, and after some thought I can amend that a little. We think and imagine against the modifications of mind, and without those modifications the mind is mostly empty. The Hindu culture would say that I am more or less in a constant state of Samadhi, and this would account for the apparent ability to enter Samapatti without even thinking about it. Unfortunately for anyone hoping to find the gene for this, the same Hindu culture would say there are just two ways to achieve this kind of Samadhi. The first is through diligent study and applications of the discipline of Yoga Sutras, Sankhya, and Buddhism and so on. The second is to be born that way. These options don't leave much scope for classical science unless we start asking different questions.

References

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