

The Healing Qualities of Consciousness

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In *Light on Life* (LOL), BKS Iyengar writes, "Since difficulties lie within ourselves, so do the solutions." While recognizing this truth, we may still feel challenged to work skillfully with our problems and develop a calm, stable mind. In the Yoga Sutras, the sage Patanjali has given a series of specific aids and remedies to remove the obstacles that block spiritual progress and distract the aspirant's consciousness. B.K.S. Iyengar refers to these remedies as the "Healing Vrittis" - healthy and positive movements of consciousness. When we practice (*abhyasa*) these qualities, the "...vrttis are channeled in the right direction for a healthy, contented life flow." (*Light on Astanga Yoga*, p. 72)

Sutras I:33-39 outline various methods of cultivating a favorable consciousness (*citta prasadanam*) and removing disturbed thoughts (*citta viksepa*.) These techniques lead to establishment of stability of mind, the effect emphasized in the highly regarded commentary of Vyasa. Sutra I:33 instructs us to relate to others in a way that brings graceful diffusion of consciousness: friendliness toward the happy, compassion toward the suffering, delight toward the virtuous, and nonjudgement toward the non-virtuous. Though disciplined effort and mindfulness, we can practice these qualities and experience *citta prasadanam* - grace and equilibrium in consciousness. "*Citta prasadanam* is the gateway to enter the spiritual kingdom." (LOAY, p. 72)

While sutras I:34-39 describe methods of developing stability of mind, they are not meant as alternatives to *maitri* (friendliness,) *karuna* (compassion,) *mudita* (gladness) and *upeksha* (indifference.) In his translation of Vyasa's commentary (*Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali with the Exposition of Vyasa*), Pandit Ushebadh Arya writes that commentators agree "...that *citta prasadanam* is the essential pre-requisite to any attempt at or method for *sthiti-nibandhana* (stabilized state of mind.) Thus, cultivating friendliness, compassion, delight and indifference prepares us to move toward establishment of a stable mind through the methods described in the next six sutras.

The first aid Patanjali offers is the breath.

I:34 praccharadana vidharanabhyam va pranasya

Or, by maintaining the pensive state felt at the time of soft and steady exhalation and during passive retention after exhalation.

In *Light on the Yoga Sutras* (LOYS) Mr. Iyengar says that this practice "ensures a state of consciousness which is like a calm lake." (LOYS, p. 82) Passive retention after exhalation soothes the nerves and quiets the mind. With exhalation and retention, we can let go of anger, desire and other negativities. Exhalation is considered to be "a sacred act of surrender." (LOL, p. 97) He also speaks of the "echo" exhalation, a final silent exhalation that continues once the normal exhalation is over. This "echo" exhalation brings an even deeper state of peace and relief. The silent state is reached only with careful observation and reflection. As Mr. Iyengar tells us, "...exhalation empties the brain and pacifies the ego, bringing to it quiescent humility." (LOL, p. 97)

The next aid in establishing a stable mind is contemplation upon an object.

I:35 visayavati va pravrittih utpanna manasah sthiti nibandhani

Or, by contemplating an object that helps to maintain steadiness of mind and consciousness.

This method is to become engrossed in an object of interest. The object of interest can be an internal or external sense object. Many commentators on the Yoga Sutras describe the process of focusing on the direct

perception of various body areas, such as the tip of the nose, palate or tip of the tongues. External or celestial objects of interest could be the sun, moon, a gem or a candle flame, for examples. Unwavering concentration on any of these can bring experiences of extrasensory perception. These experiences are not important in and of themselves, but only as indicators of the stability of mind that has been achieved. B.K.S. Iyengar writes that "...anything that facilitates concentration, reflection and inward absorption is going to begin to heal the problems of the fissured, imbalanced self." (LOL, p. 98) This sutra gives us the latitude to choose an object that holds our interest in the quest to gain insight into the phenomenon of nature (*prakṛti*) and the seer (*puruṣa*.)

Another way to become mentally quiet and stable is to contemplate a sorrowless inner light.

I:36 visoka va jyotismati

Or, inner stability is gained by contemplating a luminous, sorrowless, effulgent light.

We can practice concentrating on the center of the heart, where this effulgent light glows. "The supreme heaven shines in the lotus of the heart," says the Kaivalya Upanishad. Those who struggle and aspire may enter there." (How to Know God, p. 72) Focusing on the heart center helps us to cultivate a state of mind that is luminous (*sattvic*) and free from grief. It then becomes possible to recognize our true nature, which is blissful and pure, luminous and clear like the sky. It is as if the heart is a silent shrine within the noisy city of the body. The mind become calm, like a vast ocean without any waves. Pandit Arya explains that *sattva* becomes dominant and mind becomes established in the habit of stability.

As we aspire to spiritual freedom, it is helpful to remember those enlightened sages who are free from desires and have attained realization of the soul.

I:37 vitaraga visayam va cittam

Or, by contemplating on enlightened sages who are free from desires and attachments, calm and tranquil, or by contemplating divine objects.

As Mr. Iyengar explains, "When we contemplate those who have the qualities that we aspire to, we move closer to those qualities." (LOL, p. 98) By reflecting on the serene and pure state of saints and yogis, we can gain stability and develop a desireless state of mind. This method works not only because we are inspired by the lives of enlightened beings. Through contemplation, our own being is affected by "...the mind-fields of those from whom all attraction for attachment to sense objects is gone..." (YSPEV, p. 359)

Another healing suggestion is to contemplate in wakefulness a calm, dreamless or dream-filled sleep.

I:38 svapna nidra jnana alambanam va

Or, by recollecting and contemplating the experiences of dream-filled or dreamless sleep during a watchful, waking state.

B.K.S. Iyengar has offered two main ideas about this sutra. First, he describes four levels of consciousness: the unconscious plane of dreamless sleep (*nidra*.) the subconscious plane of dream-filled sleep (*svapna*.) the conscious plane of the wakeful state (*jagrata*) and the superconscious plane, the state of samadhi (*turya*.) By closely examining the first three states, we may come to distinguish these levels of consciousness (*citta*) and learn to transform them into a unified state. Guruji also suggests that we contemplate the soul before sleep, so the same thought flows whether we are awake, asleep or dreaming. This practice supports our progress toward spiritual bliss. Pandit Arya describes the process of using dream objects, such as the image of a deity, as support for meditation. When waking up from such a dream, we can fix the mind on the peaceful happiness that we feel. After waking from restful dreamless sleep, we can dwell on the pleasant mind (*prassanna-manah*) that comes from soothing, *sattvic* sleep.

The final healing suggestion is to meditate on any desired object conducive to steadiness of mind.

I:39 yathabhimata dhyanat va

Or, by meditating on any desired object conducive to steadiness of consciousness.

How is this different from the method described in sutra I:35, which also suggests contemplating an object that brings mental stability? One distinction is that sutra I:35 suggests an object of "interest" while sutra I:39 recommends one that is pleasing, auspicious and spiritually uplifting. This could include one-pointed attention on an asana. "The perfect performance of an asana is pleasing, and through it, too, one can gain serenity." (LOYS, p. 85) Pandit Arya in his translation of Vyasa's commentary notes that an object toward which the aspirant feels reverent faith will be effective. This practice should help one "...to discover that all sacred places of pilgrimage are within oneself." (YSPEV, p. 365) Mr. Iyengar also makes it clear that this sutra has a deeper, hidden meaning. As he writes, "What could be nearer and dearer to a yogi than that which he is seeking, the Self, the soul." (LOAY, p. 148) Thus the most "pleasing" object of meditation is the core of ones being. Mr. Iyengar says that this is the most difficult object to meditate upon, and thus it is the final sutra in this group of six methods of stilling the mind.

How can we make practical use of the wisdom contained in these sutras? The first step is to study and become familiar with their content. As Iyengar students, we might begin by studying all that Mr. Iyengar has written about them. Then we can expand our understanding by reading and contemplating the translations and commentaries of other scholars. Once we are somewhat familiar with the content, we can begin to use them in our practice. Patricia Walden suggested that after seated pranayama each morning, we sit and quietly focus on one of these six sutras. Chanting or silently repeating the sutra in Sanskrit or the English translation is one approach. Most powerfully, we can actually apply the technique that Patanjali has suggested, keeping the mind steady and stable by focusing on one of the objects of concentration that these sutras suggest.

This group of sutras demonstrates that Patanjali's teaching is inclusive and broad-based, providing a variety of methods to appeal to all types of practitioners. In *Light on Life*, Mr. Iyengar tells us that we can use the Healing Qualities to calm our hearts and minds and withdraw from the vicissitudes of life. He explains that all these sutras involve "...taking an auspicious object of contemplation that is calmer, more tranquil and more enduring and elevated than we are, and by that contemplation aligning our own mind with that more peaceful and collected state." (LOL, p. 99) How fortunate we are to have the teachings of Patanjali available to us in the context of modern life. It is truly auspicious to have access not only to the sutras themselves, but also to the illuminating commentaries of B.K.S. Iyengar and others, which help us understand the sutras and put their lessons into practice in our daily lives.

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