

The Yoga-Sutra as Practice

Michael in conversation with Chip Hartranft

Chip Hartranft's work bridges the traditions of Yoga and Buddhism. A longtime teacher and student in the Krishnamacharya lineage, he has worked with TKV Desikachar, Noelle Perez-Christiaens, AG Mohan, and many others. He has practiced Buddhist meditation for many years as well, primarily *vipassana-metta* with teachers including Larry Rosenberg, Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, and Michele McDonald. He also counts Jean Klein and Vimala Thakar as influential in his development.

I met with Chip in his comfortable office at the Arlington Center just outside Boston. Chip is the founding director of The Arlington Center, dedicated to the integration of yoga and dharma practice, and has taught a blend of yoga movement & insight meditation in the Boston area since 1978. He also conducts yearly seminars on mindbody medicine at Boston University, and leads a weeklong retreat, *The Yoga Of Awakening*, every February at Pura Vida in Costa Rica. He is the author of *The Yoga-Sutra of Patañjali: a new translation with commentary* (Shambhala, Spring, '03).

Michael Stone: Before we begin discussing Patanjali's Yoga-Sutra, is there anything we need to be warned about, in terms of common misunderstandings that might skew our approach to the text?

Chip Hartranft: The first mistake that people make when approaching the Yoga-Sutra is assuming that Patañjali is primarily trying to present a metaphysical, ontological system. It is a practical, phenomenological approach, actually, mainly interested in describing a process. It is important not to regard the Yoga Sutra so much as an explanation of the world in terms of ontology but more as a map to navigate the world of experience. A map can only take you to a place - the point is then to put aside the map and enjoy the view.

The Yoga-Suṭra is a conceptual model of the ineffable, a textbook for a learning process that's fundamentally non-intellectual. It goes, I think, beyond the seeming metaphysical duality of saṃkhya philosophy. What's presented in the Yoga-Suṭra is a way to truth that doesn't confine the yogi in practical terms to a concept of reality. If it weren't the case, you'd be enslaved by the limitations of the saṃkhya philosophy which has, as you know, many shortcomings.

Michael Stone: Because of the saṃkhya views on the existence of reality and how reality is formed?

Chip Hartranft: Yes. It's not really defensible.

Michael Stone: In what sense?

Chip Hartranft: In the way that reality is structured in saṃkhya there are different layers of manifest and undifferentiated reality. It doesn't really seem to be the way the world is. And also the idea that there are vast numbers of awarenesses, or purusas, out there, each with its own person, the jiva. But these elements, and the way that purusa is segregated from prakṛti, are of less importance as an ontological statement, a description of the way the world is, than it is as a description of the experiential movement toward clarity in which two simultaneous insights arise: first, that your own knowing ultimately reveals itself to be uncoloured by what is known, and second, that consciousness itself is empty of self. That's the key. Now what we do with our linguistic mind is we tend to thingify, reify that knowing into some kind of entity and as soon as we do, we have mentally entrapped purusa in a box not of its own making. Because, as I mentioned in my book, I think that for the yogi experiencing an opening into deep awareness, purusa is a way of knowing with no temporality, no geography, no location in space, no mass, it's not really an entity of any kind, it's a verb rather than a noun. It can't be perceived or felt in any way, but its presence becomes known when what we thought was aware, our self, is seen to be a mere succession of displays, empty of awareness in and of themselves.

Michael Stone: Could we say purusa is a moment of arising awareness?

Chip Hartranft: It doesn't even have temporality. In Patañjali's view it has always been thus. And here's a key affinity between the Yoga-Sutra and the teachings of the Buddha. Awareness is empty, alone. There's no 'me' behind it - it has no self-attributes whatsoever. Furthermore, everything that feels like a self - thoughts, feelings, and experiences - is devoid of awareness. Now that's almost impossible for the mind to comprehend because thinking posits itself as the locus of awareness in the self, and the self is laden with attributes - it's really nothing but attributes!

So there's this great dilemma: how do you transmit this from one mind to another? Of course, it isn't just Patañjali who is making an appeal to the minds of his listeners by presenting this. The Buddha and many others sages past and present find themselves in a similar quandary. The Buddha wasn't sure for seven weeks after his enlightenment whether he was going to even share this experience, this knowledge. Was it expressible? Would words squeeze it into a little box labeled 'philosophy'? The Buddha's emphasis in his teaching career on personal practice and direct experience suggest that this was a concern, as does his famous discourse to the Kalamas, in which he urged them not to accept teachings just because the words are compelling.

Michael Stone: There is a question that I was left with after reading your book, which is similar to experiences I've had in meditation, where I wonder if it's possible to articulate one's psychological state, or any experience of any moment? Can you even talk about it?

Chip Hartranft: The talk about it is instrumental in nature - its purpose is to help us locate and map and outline it conceptually, and perhaps to convey something about it to others by sharing the concepts. But the concepts are of a different order than direct knowing, or *jñāna*. Naturally, in the beginning stages of practice our concepts are more likely to be less accurate or helpful, yet we cling to them all the more tightly. Ironically, as wisdom arises our attachment to views tends to subside.

Historically, much of the language that has been chosen to describe pure awareness is negative. Awareness is *not* this, it's *not* that, *neti-neti* as Yajñavalkya said in the *Brhad-Aranyaka Upanisad*. That's a strategy of

negation, the *via negativa*. Describing awareness positively is a risky proposition, because awakening is so subtractive in nature. What the yogi is doing foremost is cultivating *nirodha*, cessation. What cessation is in actuality has been misunderstood as it's been conveyed to some extent in Buddhism, and to a huge extent in the tradition of classical yoga interpretation. Cessation is not suppression, but rather a natural process of self-attenuation, a subsiding of the rampant bodymind 'system-building' implicit in the term *samskara*, that comes about when one consistently applies the yogic will, *abhyasa* and *vairagya*, which I know we'll be talking about shortly.

But to get back to the problem of descriptive language, one is again reminded of the Buddha. After his awakening, he continued to contemplate things, for he didn't see everything on that fateful night under the Bodhi tree. Much of the next weeks his meditations filled out his understanding of the *dharma* in the largest, most macroscopic sense of the word. *Dharma* is such an important word, I think, conveying the whole of nature, particularly its process aspect unfolding lawfully as effects arising from prior causes. And *dharma* is equally important in the microscopic sense, as the irreducible stuff of experience, of phenomena, not as ontological verities in and of themselves. In all, a crucial, mind-opening word in Buddhism and in the Yoga-Sūtra, particularly right at the end when Patañjali unveils this vision of utter clarity when all suffering falls away and that is *dharma-megha samaḍhi*. It's a very important landmark, I think, in the understanding of human consciousness. But the teaching, again, is instrumental; it's merely a hermeneutic, it's a strategic interpretive device rather than a claim of pure ontology. It's a way of getting the mind to recognize that knowing is not the same stuff as the display before it, encompassing all mental events. Knowing doesn't have the attributes of what is known, any more than a mirror is intrinsically colored by the reflection it casts, and that's a world-shaking discovery. So for Patañjali, liberation is *kaivalya* which means isolation, separateness. That's the key thing that he is interested in, not philosophical speculation or metaphysics. The mind that reads about this or hears about this can't help but make mischief with it. That's just going to happen. So you have, for example, philosophers saying that Patanjali represents radical dualism where you

have on the one hand a purusa that is the end-all and be-all: it's what we all really are - in the Upanisadic phrase, *tat tvam asi*, I am that. So we seem to be talking about a Soul. On the other hand, you have prakrti, which is all this impermanent stuff coming and going, where all suffering is embedded: Matter. These two seemingly opposite poles are compared to each other as entities, like apples and oranges. But what Patañjali is trying to name is simply a fact of the world that becomes visible as we awaken: bare knowing is of a different order than the melodramas of our everyday perception. It appears to be untouched, uncolored by them. It feels omnipresent and enduring, while the perceptual stream is exposed as a succession of brief, impersonal mind-moments, devoid of awareness in and of themselves.

This is what 'freedom', or *kaivalya*, means to Patañjali, I think. So, one does not 'attain' the freedom of *kaivalya* - according to Patañjali it's already the true nature of the conventional self to be an unaware set of processes fundamentally separate from awareness, and the yogic path settles consciousness to the point where it can reflect that fact, *but not to me, myself, and I* - just to knowing itself! So let's not call it a Soul, a Self, or anything that sounds like 'the real me'.

One more thing: the yogi doesn't run away from the world to realize this. The yogi becomes completely integrated in the world and the world's right there, in every moment. The whole point of *dharma-meghah-samaḍhi* is that the yogi is free in things as they are. It's not that the yogi is abandoning the world and it's certainly not the case that the yogi, upon attaining *dharma-meghah-samaḍhi* is dying and becoming resorbed into the world as some have claimed.

Michael Stone: Enlightenment is engagement.

Chip Hartranft: Yes, that's right, but without attachment. Attachment hinders engagement. Of course, in everyday life it feels just the opposite - attachment masquerades as engagement even as our projections onto the people and objects of our world conceal their true, knowable natures.

Michael Stone: I think it becomes confusing for practitioners, especially when they have a teacher who is a literalist or a text that has been poorly translated, where the term kaivalya, is described as the practitioner's eventual isolation from the world, from the life of the body, and so on.

Chip Hartranft: Yes. Again, kaivalya is often translated as liberational freedom, as if it were an achievement of the person, but I don't think that Patañjali means it that way at all. And he certainly doesn't mean that the yogi goes off and dies at awakening, as some have suggested! The Yoga-Sutra describes a path through a world that is lived-in, offering the yamas and niyamas, for example, to maintain the conventional person's orientation toward the true purpose of living as he or she navigates through the world of people and objects.

As for kaivalya, the other words that are linked to it in the sublime final statement at the end of the Yoga-Sutra - words like *sunya* (empty) and *citi-sakti* (power of seeing) - are used to describe the emptiness of knowing. You cannot thingify knowing. It's a trap which we all fall into whenever we translate purusa or even the Upanisadic ātman as one of the 'Four Ss' – *Soul, Spirit, Seer, or Self*.

The mind, the self, is what wants to become enlightened. Why? Because the mind supposes that when it is enlightened it will have power over itself, over objects, or perhaps over other people. Our deepest hope is to have power over what seems like the real cause of suffering, which is not getting what we want. That's why the self wants to become enlightened - the yogic meaning of 'enlightened self-interest'! But it isn't the self that becomes enlightened, and enlightenment does not gratify 'me'. For Patañjali, purusa is not 'me', or even an 'it'. Purusa is just pure knowing - knowing that *witnesses* 'me'. The self, that feeling of me-ness is a conditioned set of phenomena that are prakṛtic in nature, and their illusion is that they feel like a singular 'me' entity positioned behind awareness. So our language, where these processes are assigned nouns that camouflage them as entities, can't help but betray reality. Therefore, even the remarkable words found in the Yoga-Sutra can only take us so far. The real work is to discriminate between the feeling of self and the knowing of that feeling - purusa. That is the beginning of viveka, or discrimination.

Michael Stone: Can you describe viveka?

Chip Hartranft: Let's describe viveka as a grain-by-grain realization that phenomena are empty of awareness, of self in and of themselves. The reason we'd best describe it that way is because awareness itself is unknowable - it has no mass, location, temporality, or other attributes. At awakening purusa abides in its own pure seeing, but not by seeing itself! No, there is now a recognition of emptiness in the phenomena that, just an instant earlier, felt anything but empty of self. This is the actual experience of cultivating viveka. In practical terms, we begin to recognize the emptiness of one little aspect of something in our field but are still unaware of the emptiness of everything else in that field. We notice the not-selfness of one little thing that heretofore had seemed to be self. And so, bit-by-bit, each time we sit and enter into deeper stillness we begin to intuitively recognize the emptiness of more and more of ourselves and our world. It's as if the self were a giant edifice that we're deconstructing brick by brick. Or perhaps better, we're replacing the bricks one by one with glass tiles so that more and more of a given area is rendered transparent. At enlightenment the whole edifice is still there, but it's transparent. Of course, the more bricks we replace with glass, the more we can see that other bricks might also be replaced. So, very gradually, or sometimes abruptly, our object world becomes viveka-ized, if you will. It becomes accessible to discrimination, even things that we were really holding onto, such as 'this sensation is me.'

Sensation is the best example because all of this is based on the body. Body sensations are an enormous part of what feels like *me*. In meditation, this watching as sensations come and go, gaining and then losing their seeming urgency, is very liberating. That's the primary strategy leading to cessation: you still the bodymind, which wants to constantly move towards the pleasant and away from the unpleasant, and you will inevitably feel things build up - but then if you keep watching with *vairagya*, or the will to not let yourself 'get stirred up', the buildup comes to an end. It's self-liberating in nature, a very natural process. All of our deeply cherished feelings, the constructs that Patañjali calls *pratyaya*, all have a short shelf life - even the liberational *virama-pratyaya*, or idea of cessation. As impermanent, conditioned phenomena, our feelings

arise when triggered but then pass away by themselves. So we're continually given this opportunity to awaken to their nature, and when we sit we're ready to receive it. When we're not sitting, it's just a happy accident when we do. We all have accidents like that.

Michael Stone: Could you describe one?

Chip Hartranft: I had a big enlightenment experience 16 years ago almost to the day, when my daughter was born. Her mother and I were exhausted, having been up all night with labor, and around 9:30 in the morning the baby started to crown. Suddenly, without any warning, let alone meditative practice, for about a minute or so *there was no Chip there*. Believe me, the world's a better place without Chip! And then it went away. It was just brought about by those conditions.

Michael Stone: Was Chip aware of the absence of Chip?

Chip Hartranft: No.

Michael Stone: That's what brought you back?

Chip Hartranft: Yes, Chip did.

Michael Stone: Chip came back when Chip became aware that Chip was absent.

Chip Hartranft: That's right. Chip coming back and Chip 'becoming aware' that there had been no Chip are one and the same. Suddenly the selfing process that produces 'Chip' - *ahamkara* in the Samkhya system - said, 'look what I am having' and attempted to take ownership of it. But it can't, anymore than you can eat soup with a slotted spoon. And suddenly things are planted firmly back in the sturm und drang of selfhood. So, getting back to your question about what does kaivalya really mean? It's not the freedom of the individual, it's the innate fact of separateness. Realizing that means you've recognized that knowing is fundamentally uncoloured by the known.

Michael Stone: Knowing is separate from self, which is really just an illusion.

Chip Hartranft: We have to exercise care around this word "separate". It's a metaphor, implying that we're talking about entities in space and that they are ...

Michael Stone: Subjects and objects.

Chip Hartranft: Right, subjects and objects and more objects. So maybe we keep in mind the Sanskrit *kaivalya* instead of relying on 'separate'. Do you see why? It's really not satisfactory to rely on English words because we don't have equivalents for the deeper yogic meaning, and our inadvertent metaphors take on a life of their own. So in this case, any ideas we might have about the ontological separateness of knowing and the known are much less important than the actual experiential path to awakening, in which it's finally seen that our knowing underlies all of our phenomenal life and is free of it. *Kaivalya* means free, separate in that sense only. So there's freedom in this limited sense, not in our usual self-centered desire for freedom as a domain of gratification.

Remember, the Yoga-Sutra is primarily about how a human being comes to know this freedom directly, how he or she comes to abide in it, and Patanjali says that right at the outset, and in the middle, and at the end.

Yoga is to still the patterning of consciousness. When that happens, according to Patañjali, awareness can just abide in itself and see the way things really are. The world is still there - it looks different but it's the same world. As far as whether it's an illusion or not, Patañjali is very careful to say that the world's real. He says when the world comes in through your consciousness, it's taking a very different path than the one that comes in through my consciousness, so two people never see the same thing. But the world's real. He seems to be arguing gently with Yogacara Buddhism, saying that its idealism is not quite accurate.

Michael Stone: It seems he strikes a middle path between Yogacara which he was obviously well versed in and *saṃkhya*.

Chip Hartranft: It's pretty clear from the Yoga-Sūtra and from Indian thought in general that there is a shared recognition that the world is representational in nature, that we cannot know the world other than through our representational *cittas*, or consciousness moments. That seems pretty clear. And the image of conditioned experiences, or *samskara*, as seeds is common to Yogacara and the Yoga-Sutra. The ontological part - is there a world that exists? - is of much less importance to Patanjali than perhaps to other

philosophers, I believe. His fundamental concern is how to get to the place where the nature of perceptual processes can be seen clearly and there is no more misidentification. He is not quite as interested in philosophy, I would say, letting the Samkhya provide the metaphysics.

Michael Stone: He is interested in the philosophy of perception which, when you push, you could call psychology.

Chip Hartranft: Yes, in practical terms at least.

Michael Stone: The psychology of liberation. It's interesting because right off the bat in your introduction you say Patañjali is interested in the causes of suffering and how we know what we know.

Chip Hartranft: Right.

Michael Stone: That if we're going to explore how we suffer and why we suffer, we can't get out of exploring the way we know what we know.

Chip Hartranft: For Patañjali there is really just one cause of suffering - not knowing how we know what we know. The word is *avidya*, related to the Latin *video* and our modern word 'video' - to see, I see. So *vidya* means seeing - seeing clearly, seeing directly. It can be thought of as the ultimate category of *jñana*, or direct knowing, related to the Greek *gnosis*. Not seeing, *avidya*, is the primary cause of suffering with four corollary forms of suffering, namely: *raga* which means wanting and is described as conditioned attachment to past pleasure. All forms of suffering are conditioned phenomena that can take root and germinate in the soil of not seeing clearly, of misidentification, and *raga* refers to the way one is inclined to repeat past experience which produced pleasure. And then there's an inclination away from whatever created displeasure in the past - that's *dvesa*. And then there is a process by which this history of tendencies or *anusaya* comes to feel like a unified self, a *me*, and that's *asmita*. Because it feels like the center and essence of experience, without which the world cannot exist, this self must be preserved at all costs. And so there's *abhinivesa*, the clinging to the self and its 'life'. 'Self-preservation' is a crude translation of

abhinives'ā . It's really clinging to the self as the locus of awareness because of *samyoga*, the illusion of indivisibility between purusa and prakrti. Not seeing is really the problem.

Michael Stone: So we get right back to this original question which is, how do we know how we know?

Chip Hartranft: First of all, we are looking for the source of knowing, ultimately, and the whole yogic enterprise is based on that. The patterning of consciousness refers to a continual representational flux that we take to be 'the world' and 'me' instead of a mere display. Furthermore, the self feels other than the world, as if we were separate, but is really just as much of an object as the world is - just a different object presenting itself to witnessing. Not seeing this, we're fundamentally ignorant of the true state of affairs, according to Patañjali. So the strategy for recognizing how we know 'how we know' is to let all that mental activity quiet down. Patañjali is insistent about the fact that this is a natural process and that it comes about as a consequence of the correct kind of effort and not the wrong kind of effort. It comes about through two forms of yogic will. One is *abhyāsa* which is usually translated as practice but it means something a little bit more particular, I think, which is returning to reality, returning to the orientation that it's possible to see more into this than you were a moment ago. *Abhyasa* is a compound of *abhi* and *as*, literally 'to sit facing' something, in this case the reality of this moment and coming back to that orientation again and again as necessary. The other polarity of the yogic will is *vairāgya* - not getting stirred up. 'Stirred up' refers to the eruption of conditioned experiences, or *samskāra*, that have been stamped with pleasure or displeasure and also feel like 'me'. All experiences are encoded that way, and most are going to be triggered again and again in response to new experiences of a similar nature. If I see a dog across the street, I am going to remember that I was bitten by a dog once, and my body is going to contract in fear, I am going to turn the other way and walk down the street, and I won't get the chance to experience any pleasure that contact with this new dog might actually provide. My behaviour, my actions, my karma are dictated by those old experiences. So the active yogic will is to not get stirred up by that but just to stay right here with what's happening now and actually open to it. These two exercises of yogic will, reorienting attention repeatedly toward things as they

actually are, and letting them unfold, is the true avenue of free will - without them, our lives are rather determined.

Michael Stone: The way you describe detachment is very physical, embodied, not some kind of otherworldly detachment.

Chip Hartranft: The Yoga-Su \bar{t} ra is very much about being present with and seeing through whatever is arising at any given moment, and we're a dynamic body at each and every moment of our lives.

Furthermore, we're always in the world. In his eight-limbed approach Patañjali address all the strata of being that we can experience, whether in relation to the external world of people and objects (yamas) or to personal qualities (niyama) or to the realm of the body in and of itself (asana) or at the level of its energies (pranayama), right on down to the integration of life's most basic constituents (samadhi). Gross or subtle, whatever you're doing in this moment is either skillful or unskillful, either an expression of *vidya* or *avidya*.

Michael Stone: There are two issues that you raise and they are a little bit separate so let's take them one at a time. The first one is, is Patañjali addressing the body only in one or two lines. The second question is, does yoga apply to all the contents of life? And this gets back to what we were talking about earlier, does yoga represent a disengagement with the world, an abandonment of the world?

Chip Hartranft: I don't think so. Actually, Patañjali says that the phenomenal world exists for the sake of liberation. His path doesn't lead away from the world but toward it. The yogi abandons not the world but the distorted perspective of the self. And the true nature of knowing is that it never actually was engaged with the known, even though it feels like it was and is. To Patañjali, pure awareness is freedom itself.

Now, back to the first question: hatha yoga tradition as we understand it is relatively recent, it's really the baby in the family of yoga practice. It's not to say that a lot of the energy work of hatha yoga wasn't discovered and worked with a long time ago by the wandering ascetics, the sramana. In fact, if you look back at the Vedas or in the oldest extant yoga scriptures, you'll find quite a bit of understanding about

pra[̄] na-va[̄] yus , the ‘winds’ of the body, and pra[̄] na[̄] ya[̄] ma, or how to work with energy through breathing. And it’s hard to imagine that the same wandering ascetic yogis who explored the nature of consciousness so heroically didn’t experiment with movement - stretching, say - as they did with the breath energies. However, what we do in the name of yoga today, which largely consists of the gymnastic movements of hatha yoga, is pretty recent stuff, having been systematized no more than 1200 years ago. It’s clearly not what Patañjali was writing about because he just didn’t know of it. But it doesn’t matter. In asana Patañjali is writing about the postures of meditation and precisely the same processes are occurring in the processes of meditation that are happening in the postures of the more athletic kinds of hatha yoga. Remember what hatha means, *ha* and *tha* are vibrational Sanskrit sounds, each with a different quality. *Ha* is solar and masculine, while *tha* is lunar and feminine, *hatha* evoking *siva-sakti*. All of the energy polarities that we work with in hatha yoga are symbolized by *hatha*. So for example, yoga movements combine firm and soft, up and down, left and right, energy and awareness. We are continually changing our orientation to gravity so that the tides of the body’s ocean can flow the other way. We are acting to integrate the right side with the left side. We are aiming for balance between action and clarity. And so all these different dualities, the twos, the dvandvas, if you will, are cultivated and worked with in a skillful way through hatha yoga. I speculate in my book that if Patañjali were alive today he would surely do hatha yoga or something like it because it attunes one to the energies of the body and exposes conditioned forms of effort and selfmaking - essentials on Patañjali’s path. And Svātmaṛama, the author of the oldest surviving text on hatha yoga, the 14th century *Hatha-Yoga-Pradīpikā*, stated that neither hatha yoga nor the ‘raja’ yoga of Patañjali is as effective alone as when combined. I practice and teach them together.

Because to get back to your question, I think that the entirety of the Yoga-Sūtra is about somatic experience, because that’s what we are in. You might say that in any given moment we’re like Mount Fuji, a mountain of somatic experience atop of which there is a snowcap of mentality concealing what lies below.

MICHAEL STONE: The psychological is informed by the somatic.

Chip Hartranft: We can't see through the snow into the mountain but it's the mountain that's beneath it and is by far the greater part, the foundation upon which the mind rests. Every thought we have, no matter how cool or rational, is grounded in physical experience, mostly unconscious. The interrelation between mental and somatic activity is very clearly seen whenever we sit still, as body experiences start to intensify just from sitting still. Intense physical sensations evoke certain kinds of thought patterns related to the body feeling that way. And when we have those kinds of mental or emotional experiences the body begins to react in accordance with them because the original imprints, if you will, the samskāras, were somatic in nature. So body is reinforcing mind, and mind body. Every time we have an experience it's as a whole person. Just because we can't feel that or cognize it under ordinary circumstances doesn't mean it isn't so.

Michael Stone: A lot is happening below the level of awareness.

Chip Hartranft: An inconceivable amount.

Michael Stone: We can't take in consciously the different acids in the stomach. There is a certain level where it's not possible for consciousness to go there.

Chip Hartranft: Well there are a couple of things that are going on here. One is that the cortex doesn't get a lot of information from many of the afferent neuro pathways. Very little of the data coming from the internal organs, for example, is meant for the cognizing part of the brain - it's routed to lower parts of the brain that coordinate organic activities. So that's one piece of it. Another piece is that when we have an emotion arise in us, it's actually a somatic experience that we become aware of later. Emotions arise in the body as invisible physiological reactions to our environment that are subsequently cognized as feelings by the more complex - and therefore much slower - associative activities of the cortex. So for example, I am walking in the woods and I suddenly get a knot in my stomach. I'm beginning to feel a little creepy. Then I become aware that there is a feeling of something watching me, there's an animal out there. And I am alone, miles from the nearest human or dwelling and when I get this feeling that there is something watching me, I

become afraid. Well, what came first? The somatic experience. In time it crystallized as a feeling of fear, but prior to that cognition the *emotion* of fear had already arisen in the body as a set of reactions.

Michael Stone: The somatic processing of experience is pre-conceptual...

Chip Hartranft: At some point it is put into a kind of a mental language, what Patañjali calls *pratyaya*, a construct that appears before the mind. Georg Feuerstein calls it a “presented idea” which is an elaborate way of saying a construct that appears before the mind. In our forest scenario, it’s not necessarily ‘I am frightened,’ it’s the content of that, “ooh, there’s something out there”. The lower parts of the brain are receiving data from neuro inputs throughout the body and formulating a complex response to it. The mind is the last to know - but the first to take credit for it!

Michael Stone: I agree with your comment that the entirety of the Yoga-Sutra refers to bodily life. If you look at the eight limbs of *astanga-yoga*, each of them, in a sense, can only be relevant in terms of a body that’s there. If you look at the *yamas*, for example, what is it that it wants to steal? A hungry body or a body that’s afraid. What is it that has lust, it’s a body. Right?

Chip Hartranft: Well, you might say that there are different layers of relationship to the world, layers that grow increasingly interiorized and personal, from the inside looking out. ‘Interiorized’ is not exactly the same thing as ‘internal’ to Patañjali. He says at the beginning of the third book that the last three limbs are more interiorized than the preceding five and that’s important because he is saying that one is acquiring a perspective from the inside looking out, more like pure awareness and less like a needy ‘me’. We’re not just a self flying face first into the world of objects. We are beginning to operate from an observing point of view which arises naturally as a consequence of following the yogic path. And this perspective is always at hand, always possible. To borrow an image from other Indian traditions, when muddy waters become still, the water clarifies. Clarity is the true nature of water at all times, actually - the particles of mud, suspended in the water by incessant agitation, are what obscure this fact. Likewise, clear knowing is always the

medium by which the consciousness display is realized, but the ‘whorls’ of consciousness - *citta-vrtti* - conceal knowing’s true nature.

Michael Stone: And these are products of conditioning.

Chip Hartranft: Right. For both Patañjali and the Buddha, suffering is produced by the agitation of getting what you don’t want and wanting what you don’t get, and both are conditional. In particular, the Buddha’s formulation of these conditioned processes, *paticca-samuppada*, or ‘dependent origination’ is a remarkably detailed observation of the circular chain of conditioned self-events that mire us in misunderstanding and stress. Patañjali likewise posits a circular view in which avidya conditions the self-defeating experiences that perpetuate it.

In the awakening traditions, images of circularity have been very important both in the micro sense of moment to moment consciousness and in the macro sense of one lifetime to the next, reaping the fruit of earlier actions again and again. to the point even of passing over the barrier from one life to the next.

For us today I think it’s more important to apply these teachings microscopically in the moment than to dwell on metaphysical speculation. Dependent origination is traditionally taken to be a description of the way one life becomes the next life and then another, involving three separate lifetimes: the previous one, the present one and the future one. In ancient times there was a strong cultural belief in rebirth but I don’t think that one has to rely on a theory of rebirth in order to comprehend dependent origination. It’s actually harder to understand when taken that way, I think. Instead, you can look at it as what’s happening right now, seeing how feeling, or *vedana*, gives rise to wanting, *tanha*, which gives rise to clinging *upadana* and that gives rise to becoming, right here in the moment, and that each new patterning is rebirth in a sense. You are born into a new moment of “here I am, it’s me again.” If you use dependent origination as a map guiding you to how you actually are right now, you can zero in on that critical link of feeling/*vedana* where it becomes wanting/*tanha*, in Sanskrit *tr̥sna*, and that’s where the work of yoga is done. It’s pretty hard to do the work at the level of human birth - waaah!. So the only place we can truly look at is right here.

What does *vedana* mean? It means feeling, or more precisely the feeling tone of a sensation. So here we are at the body again. Whether you are talking about the *yamas* or the *niyamas*, whether you're talking about *asana*, you're talking about a person who is embodied.

It's very instructive to see what Patañjali is really saying about *asana* in the second book, line 46, *sthirasukham-asana*. *Sthira* means steady or stable; *sukha*, meaning happiness, delight, comfort; *asana* here having a very special meaning from the root *as*, 'to sit'. In other words, to awaken the body must attain steadiness and ease. This doesn't seem to have anything to do with the dynamic asanas of later hatha yoga, by the way.

Michael Stone: The word *asana* means sit, to sit, sitting. Sitting, however, is a metaphor, it's "sitting with..."

Chip Hartranft: Yes. That's very important to get. For Patañjali, *asana* is related to *abhyasa*, to 'sit facing' reality. If a person views an *asana* simply as a hatha yoga exercise, a gymnastic pose or posture, they aren't facing the right way. There's no pose or posture at all in *asana*, but rather the experience of steadiness imparted by profound psychosomatic tranquillity and effortlessness, as Patañjali makes crystal clear in the next two lines. To see *asana* otherwise is to become mired in temporality and thingness. So, if you view yoga as *asana*, what you're talking about is a process of sitting in awareness in this particular arrangement of the body, and I think that all of the *asanas* that we do have an archetypal quality of organizing the energies of the body in ways that allow for meditation.

Michael Stone: Do different meditative asanas have different effects in the same way that different hatha yogasanas do?

Chip Hartranft: Yes, in that they produce different patterns of sensation and movement of energy created by the various balances, pressures, orientation to gravity and various processes that the bodymind is being asked to attend to. The kind of unwinding, for example, that the soft tissues and the neuro-musculature are being asked to do in any given *asana* or the holding that they are being asked to do, constitute processes

through which one sits in awareness as change unfolds. This is a very deep understanding of aśana and when you teach hatha yoga, you have to teach it, I think, in that way to keep yourself in the practice of yoga.

MICHAEL STONE: Surely, asana is not the only place spontaneous meditation occurs?

Chip Hartranft: Not at all - in fact, at the start of book four Patañjali says that the attainments of yoga can arise through austerity, chanting, or the ingestion of herbs. You can even be born enlightened!

As for myself, the most accomplished yogi I've ever seen is a person who has probably never done formal yoga or meditation in his life - the Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini. The first dozen times I heard him play he didn't make a single mistake. That's amazing considering that a typical piano recital might have 30,000 or 40,000 notes at least. He may be the most note-perfect pianist who ever lived, but it isn't because he is over-rehearsed, and his playing sounds anything but rigid. Actually Pollini plays with stupendous freedom because he seems to be completely in the moment, which makes his playing an astonishingly organic experience. And yet his expressive range is nuanced so finely, almost microscopically, that the distracted listener often misses it.

So you don't necessarily have to be doing the activity called 'yoga' to be in yoga. And a lot of the time when we think we're doing yoga, we're not moving in the right direction - we're getting mired in the self, in the narcissistic objectives of the yoga, we're comparing ourselves, we're feeling very self-conscious, we're working from the outside trying to bend our body into some shape for some self-centered reason. And so we're really heavily in suffering. Most yoga classes I go to are pageants of dukkha! Everybody is just suffering like crazy. But this kind of suffering feels like it's good for you, sort of antiseptic.

Michael Stone: It's easy to mistake desire for being, doing with observing, performing with receiving...

Chip Hartranft: That's the easiest thing to do, according to Patañjali. Let's say I've come to a yoga studio and class is starting. Have I checked all my wanting and not wanting at the door? No, I'm still the same old self, fearing pain and hoping for gratification. Now when I get the euphoric endorphin rushes that come with practice, I am going to mistake them for the goal, and each time I do yoga I'm going to strive unconsciously

to recreate that pleasure. So Patañjali is saying that the relationship to the body must be very carefully cultivated. The body is the biggest part of the world that we know. And the world of the body is immense. The body in an enormous universe in and of itself.

Michael Stone: Can we go through the following line, II.47, of patanjali's together? *prayatna satilya ananta-samaṁ patti*. Now, you define these terms as follows: prayatna means effort, satilya, relaxation, letting go unwinding, ananta, endless, boundless, without end...

Chip Hartranft: And samaṁ patti means coalescence. Samaṁ patti is the growing recognition of non-duality between self and other. To use a scientific metaphor, it's the precursor of samaṁ dhi. Samaṁ patti is the ground of concentrated awareness in which samaṁ dhi germinates. Now we're not even half way through the eight limbs, we're just on the third limb and he's saying when you are sitting in awareness and letting go of all effort, the distinction between self and other fall away - enlightenment is underway. But you have to let go of all effort. And what does he mean by effort? Well, to him all effort is karma, volitional action that's driven by suffering and misperception. It's conditioned, occurring in real time but derived from past notions, from past experiences of liking, disliking, and the need to preserve what feels like a self owning these likes and dislikes. Such forms of suffering clearly arise from not seeing the true nature of things, so most of the actions that we take just further the agenda of this self, the book of me and what it thinks it wants, its rules. Almost all forms of effort derive from these conditioned patterns. What Patañjali is saying is this: when you let go of effort and are just sitting in awareness through what's happening, then those distinctions fall away on their own. It's not that we consciously decree that they fall away and they do - there is a natural process of them falling away. We have laid the groundwork for it by letting go of effort, but the realization arrives uninvited. All our usual efforts - driven by wanting and not wanting, by 'me' - are falling away. Suddenly things are seen as non-dual: *it's all prakṛti: conditioned, impersonal, empty of awareness*. And as he describes samaṁ patti, the usual distinctions between the subject "me", the object 'this', and the act of observation, fall away. All is then reflected equally as if in a jewel. As I mentioned earlier, it's very similar

to the Zen image of the mirror, in that things pass before a mirror but the mirror itself isn't coloured by them even though it holds their reflections momentarily. Remember Dogen's famous poem where the geese fly overhead and the water casts their reflections without knowing it?

So that's the second line about asana, which establishes that we're talking about a level of karmic activity that falls far below hatha yoga, where you're really letting go of all effort. Now that's not to say that doing this exact same thing in the midst of hatha yoga isn't the idea - it is. When we do a strenuous hatha yoga pose, as we were doing this morning in class, what everyone needs to know is that right now at any given moment, we are unconsciously generating countless mental and physical actions. We're using way too much effort, and we mistakenly think all that doing *is* the yoga. But it can be more like the sitting process, where we learn to use the barest physical effort necessary to keep from toppling over. It's not that there's no effort - actually, a minimal effort to lift the thoracic spine and neck allows one to relax much more significant neighboring efforts in the head and limbs. So it's not that what Patanjali is talking about here doesn't apply to hatha yoga, it's just that when you do hatha yoga, you're not going to be entering *samaṁ patti* very much. When you sit still the way he recommends in the Yoga-Sutra, you will. You will fall into *samaṁ patti* every day once you've been doing this long enough to learn not to waste a lot of time thinking about how to further the agenda of the self, which is what most of our sitting is. Trying to become enlightened is an agenda of the self. Letting go of that is a major victory over our conditioning.

Michael Stone: Patanjali goes on to say that after effort relaxes, one is no longer disturbed by the play of opposites, revealing that the body and the infinite universe are indivisible. (2.47-48) Where does my body leave off and the world begins, at the tip of a finger? What about in a feeling or an emotion? How is that line drawn? As one sees through these distinctions, it becomes obvious that Patanjali's model of yoga is not dualistic in any way.

Chip Hartranft: It's very important, what you are getting at: to recognize that from a practical point of view, samaḥ dhi is a non-dual experience, that's what samaḥ dhi literally means - everything is being 'put together'.

Michael Stone: The paradox, however, is that everything is already put together.

Chip Hartranft: Exactly, and samaḥ patti/samaḥ dhi is the realization of this. It's non-dual in the sense that self - what feels like 'me' - and everything else are all composed of the same stuff, they are all subject to impermanence, empty of self and also permeated with suffering. Sound familiar? Those are the three marks of existence according to the Buddha. Patañjali says the same thing, namely, that suffering is tied up with not recognizing this and therefore seeing the impermanent as permanent, the un-selfed as selfed and suffering as pleasant.

Michael Stone: Could you speak about the importance of feelings in the process of discernment?

Chip Hartranft: A critical attainment in yoga is recognizing that a feeling is a feeling. Ordinarily we don't recognize that a feeling is a feeling - it's just the way the world seems. When we are depressed, we don't say, "sadness has arisen". We say, "the world is unpleasant, the world is oppressive, onerous, unfair, cruel." If there's a bit of awareness we might come to say "I am sad". And then at a certain point we may have a psychological insight, "I'm depressed," and now there is some recognition that feelings are processes we can work with a little bit. The yogic path takes one still farther down this road - we begin to see the conditionality of feelings right in the moment, what the Buddha called their 'arising & passing away' in relation to proximate factors. So the beginning of discrimination - again we are talking about the grain-by-grain realization of viveka - is detecting the mechanical way that feelings arise. That is to say, when we have a feeling, that's it's not just the world in and of itself producing this sense that we have, but rather our conditioned response, a reflex in which a conditioned set of mental and physical processes are re-animated by, triggered by reminiscent events. To see that is to arrive at a wonderful new level of clarity. We have an opportunity to do this each time the shelf life of a construct or *pratyaya* is reached. That's why there's no

such thing as a wasted sitting: we just sit, watching the bodymind. What you see is that though we talk about mind there really is no mind, but rather these impersonal mechanical processes that occur in very predictable ways, one of which is to *feel* personal. Is that to say that our life is completely determined? Is there free will? Yes - we can choose to become aware of it. Then the possibilities of freedom are boundless, according to Patañjali. It's a very optimistic view. Now, perhaps I shouldn't say optimistic because that implies an unrealistic hopefulness about things, but I do think the Yoga-Sutra presents a very realistic appraisal of human possibility. Of course, Patañjali says that realizing this possibility requires ardour - you have to make it the central priority of every aspect of your life, and the 8-limbed path crosses every stratum of one's life - but he says if you practice wholeheartedly enlightenment's at hand, it's right next to you.

Michael Stone: Always right there.

Chip Hartranft: Yes, when he says realization is at hand he doesn't just mean geographically, as in 'right here' - he means temporally too - it's just an opening moment away. The enlightened yogi is in the same room that you are, looking at the same sort of stuff. I think the thing that's so hard for the mind to accept is that enlightenment feels like *this*, whatever 'this' happens to feel like right now. The mind thinks *it can't feel like this, enlightenment can't feel the way my knee hurts, enlightenment can't feel like my loneliness, it can't feel like my hunger or headache or gas pains*. It can't feel like anything but angelic, utter comfort of the body, rapture, and so on - a kind of Technicolor version concocted by the mind.

Of course, Patañjali observes that bliss, or *ananda*, is indeed a part of the enlightenment process, in the first stages of samadhi, just as the Buddha taught. In the first two *jhanas*, rapture, or *piti*, and pleasure, or *sukha*, arise. *Piti* is a factor of enlightenment and as we awaken we do have periods of opening where there is a lot of rapture present. And instead of 'rapture', maybe a less culturally freighted translation for the Pali term *piti* would be 'zest'. But the self doesn't get to choose that or own it and when the self tightens its grip around these experiences, they evaporate. Again, it isn't the self, the 'me' that awakens - the self is *awakened to*. But this is a process and during the process there are points where we have deep realization

and yet the self is still quite present and taking ownership of the process, while drives and defenses continue to exist. Fairly realized people are still capable of letting their kles'as, their suffering energies dictate their behaviour and cause suffering for others. To Patañjali we are not really free of suffering and therefore free of causing suffering for others until the very last threshold stage of realization, dharma-megha samañdhi, where reality really deconstructs. It's not that it vanishes and everything goes black and that's the culmination of the yogic endeavour, it isn't that at all. You're looking at the same things, it's just that what seemed so compelling about them, their personal drama -their dynamism, their light, their mass and solidity - their gunas are seen as irrelevant. It's not that they go away but the drama of them is no longer compelling or mandatory. When discrimination, or *viveka*, is established panoramically, what is now most compelling about the qualities of the moment is their 'not-me-ness'.

Michael Stone: One of the questions most often asked by students who begin studying the Yoga Sutra, is whether or not it is a theistic system?

Chip Hartranft: Let me quote S. Radhakrishnan to say that both yoga and samkhya are indifferent to theism. That is, these systems include an omniscient awareness that doesn't really have much to do with the pantheon of the day. Those gods - Brahma, Visnu, Siva - are characters with names, stories, relationships. Isvara, on the other hand, is beyond time, cause & effect - just awareness, nothing more. And Patañjali seems to be saying that isvara is a purusa like yours or mine, except for one thing: whereas each of us individuals, or jivas, is 'affiliated' or 'coupled' (samyoga) with a purusa, the isvara-purusa is unaffiliated. And even though we seem to be, our true state is also unaffiliated - kaivalya. So, when Patañjali is talking about iñs'vara, he doesn't mean the same thing as is meant in the Upanisads or Vedanta where iñs'vara is a character whose play produces the manifestation of the world. Patañjali's isvara is most certainly not an object of devotion. To benefit from isvara, we must practice 'isvara-pranidhana' - that is, aligning ourselves to the 'unaffiliated', purely aware perspective of isvara. In this perspective we emerge from avidya to see the true freedom existing amidst the illusion of prakrtic entanglement.

Whenever you read a Vedantic interpretation of the Yoga-Suṭra you know it right away, because their idea of isvara is so different. In fact, the title of the famous translation from the 1950s by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood is *How to Know God*. Since I first saw it early in my yoga career in the 70's, that title always made me feel a little funny. Does yoga actually bring about an encounter with a god, or God - is that the point? Then when I read the Yoga-Suṭra I started to get the sense that that's not what it was about because God doesn't appear to anyone, neither at the beginning nor at the end. When the yogi finally attains dharma-megha samaḍhi and sees the world as it is, there is no God there - no isvara, not even Visnu or Siva. And also, there is the line describing svadhyaya as deepening a yogi's communion with his or her personal deities (II.44). Surely many of Patañjali's followers were devoted to one god or another, yet pursued the path of yoga with him and other teachers without much conflict.

So iśvara is not subject to devotion; it's not about, for example, doing ceremonies or prayers or trying to please iśvara. As I mentioned, the phrase iśvara pranidhāna means orienting yourself to the same perspective, the perspective of iśvara or purusa, take your pick, because they both have the same perspective, which means that they are the knowing that pervades the known. Patañjali seems to be saying *don't try to ingratiate yourself to a divine being - orient yourself to the divine perspective*. Isvara/purusa is simply the power of seeing itself. He seems to be saying emphatically that this power is what is truly divine.

Michael Stone: He sees the trouble in idolization.

Chip Hartranft: Yes, idolatry is an example of avidyā - you're imputing attributes to something that doesn't require them. Patañjali starts out by describing iśvara as what it isn't, so it's negative, he's saying it's not this, it's not that, it's out of time and space and not subject to cause and effect

Michael Stone: Historically, in the context of Patanjali's religious milieu, concepts of God had good marketing appeal....

Chip Hartranft: Yes, you couldn't really go out on the hustings without divinities and superpowers. That's true. But I think that Patañjali throws a big tent - he accommodates all the threads of yogic knowledge

known in his day, around 200 CE. And he's saying there isn't any one way to do this - different approaches are valid depending on who you are. You can choose any object of concentration you like, internal or external, big or small, but as you practice, things become simpler. We start out practicing with many different methods but those approaches become more similar as we awaken because there is simply less and less of that individuality, the book of "me". Every person is like a different book of me, and all those books on the library shelf are vastly different. The yogic path is a little different for each one, but as we start seeing through the distinctions in samapatti, the knowing that's behind the known sees reality the same way. It is probable that Patañjali's familiarity with different yoga traditions, as well as personal experience of this diversity in himself and his students, gave him the confidence to state that when self quiets down through the stilling process of nirodha - brought about through the eight limbs - we'll see the same truths. He's very clear about that - when the constructive activity of the self project quiets down, we're all going to see that the gunas are actually irrelevant insofar as seeing itself is concerned, being uncoloured by phenomena.

Michael Stone: It's just seeing.

Chip Hartranft: It's just seeing and we didn't even know that it was there. We think consciousness - and the 'self' it concocts - possess the power to see, but they don't. For Patañjali this is the central human error, causing us to look away from the very things that will liberate us and also inclining us to hanker after the things that keep us enslaved. This error may be universal, but in any moment we can re-orient ourselves and come to see the self and the world through divine eyes. To Patañjali, realizing the true nature of awareness fulfills the deepest possibility of both human beings and the universe we're made of. It's what we're here for.

