



Sanatana Mitra

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Upcoming Events

Mar. 19th - Chakra Healing 1
Singapore

Mar. 20th - Opening the Third-Eye
Singapore

Mar. 27th - Kriya Review
Union City, CA

Mind Your Vritti

A fundamental concept that all spiritual aspirants seeking to understand and control their minds need to know as much about as possible is that of vritti. Sage Patanjali defined that “yoga is the constraint of the vrittis of the mind-stuff.”

The vrittis come from the mind, just like the light rays are emitted from the Sun. The mind sends forth a vritti to perceive an object analogous to removing the veil surrounding the object. In order for the mind to perceive an object that it is concentrating on, it must take the form of the object – an image is formed in the mind-stuff or citta. Think how radar is used to detect distant objects and form images of them as the signals are bounced off the objects.

The mind that is focused outward send outward directed vritti or bahirmukha vritti which tends to increase desires and agitation, while during meditation, the mind is focused inward and therefore send inward facing vritti or antarmukha vritti which increases peace and contentment. Remember that there are three principles that underlie all life – the stasis principle, the active principle and light principle – tamas, rajas, and sattva respectively. An out-

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Who Is An Acharya?

There is and always have been confusion about spiritual teachings and spiritual teachers – it is not a modern phenomenon. The sages have tried to give some clarity by providing guidelines for both teachers and seekers. However, due to the ego of unrealized beings, illusions and delusions abound and it is difficult to stay firmly in the light of the Self.

One of my friends in Russia, last week, emailed me to muse about his difficulties in finding a spiritual preceptor and I think it may be a good idea to explore some concepts about spiritual teachers.

An acharya is a path that leads to liberation from the cycle of death and birth and freedom from the shackles of karma. One who can initiate another

into an acharya is called an acharya or spiritual preceptor. This should not be confused with an upadhyaya or instructor into spiritual knowledge which may sometimes include yogic techniques without true initiation. Many supposed acharyas are really upadhyayas and may not really realize it in the haste to help their fellow beings.

The term guru signifies one who removes darkness and ignorance and in spiritual traditions is synonymous with acharya. There has been a lot of baggage carried by the term Guru due to the excesses and fraudulent claims in recent times. However, this does not in any way diminish the role of a true Guru, just as low-priced knock-offs of rolex watches have not affected the value of the real article. An unfortu-

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Overcome The Effect Of Vritti

Human suffering is due to our identification with the vritti or fluctuations of the mind. Vritti can take the form of thoughts, feelings, emotions and abstract concepts. It is the vritti which binds us to an object – when one identifies with the vritti and through the vritti with the object. Suffering arises when one identifies with the vritti of his or her physical body and consequently with the physical body itself – “I am this body!” When someone else’s body is diseased, one does not feel the pain but when one’s own body is sick, the one thinks that “I am sick,” due to the

ego identifying with that body.

One method of overcoming this effect of vritti is by the method of Silent Witnessing (Sakshi Bhava). There are two modes of practice:

1. Dedicated practice – sit as in meditation with back straight and body relaxed, watch your thoughts, feelings and emotions without identifying with them. Do not try to stop them but try not to react to them either. It is as if you’ve split yourself into two selves – one that is having the vritti and the other one is the silent witness who only watches with awareness.

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nate side-effect of counterfeit currency is that every \$100 bill is suspect and thoroughly checked. We have a little more confidence if the \$100 bill comes from the bank and so also we should make sure of the legitimacy of spiritual teachers – examine their lineage, background, teachings and character before committing oneself.

Although the term acharya and guru are used interchangeably, there is one subtle difference in that the acharya is more focused on the passing on of a particular spiritual path while the guru may focus more on interpersonal and psychological de-conditioning of the student. The Bhagavad Gita considers that reverence for the acharya is a sign of the student's wisdom while medieval texts encourage the student to perform Guru-Bhakti or devotion to the

spiritual teacher as a means of receiving spiritual grace. The acharya is considered a trustworthy guide while the guru is worshipped as a divine being.

There are many varied students with different needs – some want an instructor, others want to be initiated into a spiritual path while yet others want to give themselves in devotion to a divine being. Sometimes a student starts out alone and eventually meets certain obstacles on his path and only then feels the need for a guide while others begin with the search for a preceptor.

There are three levels of acharya – the first is the acharya who points the way, giving guidance on the path that she has successfully navigated, the second is the acharya who awakens the student and acts as a catalyst for higher consciousness, the third is the

acharya who liberates the student, taking total responsibility for the welfare of disciple. The third type of acharya is equivalent to the responsibility of a Sat-Guru. It is important to understand that an acharya may function on all three levels depending on the student. To some students, he guides, to others, he awakens and yet for a very few or maybe only one, he liberates. The factors involved are karmic in nature and depends on the students past life actions as well as present life intensity.

A spiritual seeker who feels a need to connect with a spiritual teacher should examine more closely what she is looking for – what type of preceptor he wants to help him in his journey. Then she should prepare herself by doing her own practices whatever they may be while keeping an eye out for the teacher, for it is wisely said, “when the student is ready, the teacher appears.”

Mind Your Vritti

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going vritti enhances the active principle while an inward vritti enhances the light principle. Meditation results in a sattvic mind while succumbing to emotions and desires result in a rajasic mind.

The desire and attachment to objects is really our desire and attachment to the corresponding vritti in the mind. In fact, due to the operation of our ego, we identify with the vritti of the body – “I am this body,” and therefore lose touch with our true nature resulting in suffering and death. We say, “I am afraid,” when we identify with the fear vritti and so on and so forth resulting in our binding in this karmic prison. All our emotional ups and downs result from identifying with the vrittis that come and go in the mind-stuff.

One way to further distinguish between vritti is from the source since

our mind actually consists of the lower mind or manas based on sensory perception and the higher mind called buddhi. In this way, there is a progression from the manas vritti to the buddhi vritti, from sensory/analytical/error-prone mind function to the intuitive/discriminative/wisdom mind function. Higher still is the witness or sakshi vritti when the sadhak enters into the witness state of consciousness in which the sakshi vritti enables the witnessing of the modifications of the manas and buddhi. A fourth state is generated when one focuses on one's True Self – this is an undifferentiated vritti of unity. In the fifth stage is the vritti that dissolves all vritti and itself as well and consequently, the mind with it – more than even the worm that eats its own tail! There are meditations in the wisdom path that teaches how to progress through these five modes.

Another model that is helpful for yogis is that given by Patanjali who also

distinguished five vrittis – correct inference (pramana), mistaken inference (viparyaya), fantasy (vikalpa), sleep (nidra) and memory (smriti). These are not all the mental vrittis that one can distinguish but are considered to be the main ones that are critical to control in order to achieve the yogic Samadhi states. The practices of Patanjali yoga suppress these five vrittis in order to rid one of desires and attachment.

There are innumerable vrittis, some strong and others weak and it requires great patience and strength to destroy the vrittis. The practice of yama prescribed by Patanjali – truthfulness, non-violence, turning towards our True Self, non-stealing and non-attachment are fundamental in destroying negative vrittis. The negative vrittis must be destroyed so that the mind is purified in order for the seeker to make progress in higher meditations.

A New Approach In Education Is Needed

There are inherent flaws in the current education system that has persisted for several hundred years because of a lack in the understanding of human nature. John Locke in the 17th century epitomizes this ignorance when he stated, “I think I may say that of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are good or evil, useful or not, by their education.”

The basic beliefs underlying our education system can be summarized as follows:

1. The child’s mind is an empty cabinet or tabula rasa (blank slate) and education is about filling the cabinet with “correct or useful” teachings

2. It is education which determines the wellbeing and usefulness of the person since the child is born inherently good but can get messed up due to a bad environment

3. Child-hood impressions are the strongest and we should ensure that there is as much positive input as possible and not find fault with the child

The problem is that in reality, the human consciousness is only one-tenth of our nature and nine-tenths are hidden in the subconscious mind. None of our education systems are trying to address this vast uncharted territory. According to the yogic sages, we are not born with a blank slate but with the burden of karmic imprints due to our past actions – we are born with “programs” which pre-dispose us to certain emotional and mental reactions. The flaw in our education system is that we don’t even try to teach any system of ethics to overcome the negative pull of our subconscious mind. Ethics is somehow confused with religion in the West and so there is no pursuit of proper behavior in a secular environment. In religious schools, the position is to throw guilt and fear at the child in order to control the negative tendencies, further alienat-

ing and confusing the human potential.

There is no easy solution to the current mis-education as there are no teachers who can actually provide the needed therapy for overcoming karmic imprints in grade and high school environments. It is necessary to educate adults who can in due time take over the roles of teachers in our school system. A top-down approach is needed. There is a need to formulate a yogic system of education which recognizes the role of karmic imprints and can overcome these imprints so that the teacher can be role models for future generations. Currently, our teachers in school are for the most part well-meaning and hardworking but blind to the real problems troubling their students. The students are not being educated to realize their human potential.

We will first have to train a new generation of adults who can become responsible parents and teachers. Each one needs to be instilled with an ethical compass and provided tools to handle sub-conscious imprints, without which he is just a puppet dancing to the strings of his programs. Can this be done in one or two generations? Probably not, but I sense that a start will be made soon to go the next step in human education. In the last one hundred years there have been spiritual people who have tried in various ways to setup better educational systems but these have been isolated and have had little impact on the general education system controlled by governments.

It will be necessary to utilize the wisdom of the yogis and sages within the context of the modern world and to make it relevant to the peoples of our times without burdening everyone with the need to overcome all suffering and attain liberation, for not everyone is seeking release from this world. It is necessary to provide the means for

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2. Daily activity practice – this is a more advanced technique when one becomes the silent witness during all of one’s activities such as driving, walking, talking, working, bathing, brushing teeth, eating etc. It will be easier if one practices initially for a short time such as during solitary meals or morning toiletries rather than during talking or interaction with others. As you become more proficient, then you can include more complex tasks.

It is said that Yogananda encouraged his disciples to go to the theatre and watch movies so that they could experience the world as merely another projection of the divine mind. However, we often get emotionally involved with the characters or activities in a movie and start identifying with them. Success in Sakshi Bhava requires identifying with the spirit or atman and not the body or mind – this overcomes the ego’s identification with this body vritti generated by the mind. During the practice, you become the Sakshi or silent witness and watch your other self as if appearing in a movie.

This practice first loosens the grip of the ego, lessens the suffering of mis-identification and increases peace and contentment.

increasing human consciousness in the practical context of being a better person and attaining more freedom of expression in positive ways. My Master says that human beings must evolve from “man the brute to man the Man and then to man the God.” The current education system is deficient in evolving us to our full humanity because it does not recognize the fundamental reality of karma.

To Subdue Body and Mind

Living in Calm and Solitude
Subduing body and his Mind
Within himself in gratitude
Ridding Desires of all Kind.
– from poem Yogi
by Yogiraj Siddhanath

It is always instructive to study the words of great Masters, whether past or present in order to keep ourselves on the true path.

This verse is not a call to run off to the hills and caves or give up all social interactions. It is easier to appear to be calm when one is all alone in a cave, but the true test comes when in the midst of interruptions, noise and other disruptive influences, one can keep the calm. Only the calm that comes from being tempered in the forge of the hurly-burly life of a householder can stay

the test of time.

The enemy to be subdued is restlessness. The physical body moves and fidgets, the toes tap and the fingers twiddle. The mind is a monkey that runs here and there to get entangled in the scorpion nest of sense desires or climbs up a tree to be eaten by the panther of subconscious impulses. The practice of self-control brings about a steady body and a still mind. The physical body is controlled by maintaining tension-free and steady postures or asanas. The mind is controlled by the cultivation of the five restraints or yamas – truthfulness, non-harming, turning one's energy towards spirituality, non-stealing and non-attachment to worldly things.

True solitude eludes us because of the dichotomy of body and mind.

When body and mind are subdued and they are seen to be only the manifestation of spirit – when body and mind become one with spirit, then true solitude is attained.

As the body and mind become purified, contentment or santosha arises. The karmic imprints or samskaras which give rise to all kinds of desires are then amenable to be removed or burnt off by the fire of the yogi's practice. The very movements in the mind becomes controlled – the vrittis no longer trouble the yogi.

As the layers of ignorance are removed, the yogi lives more and more in his true nature, his true Self. A sense of gratitude to the spiritual guide or Guru and to the Divine arises in the heart of the yogi – not an emotion that comes and goes but a state of Grace that is true devotion or bhakti.