Introduction

The purpose and end of yoga practices are to achieve Kaivalya, the ultimate freedom that all of us seem to seek. The steps to this final goal are enunciated in Sage Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras and it is necessary to follow these steps if one is aiming for the final outcome. Each step in the process of advancement has a specific role in shaping the outcome, and hence, it is necessary to follow each step meticulously. Let us briefly note the contribution of each practice in the overall development of an individual.

Yama and niyama are ethical codes required to be in focus while we start the practices. These ethical codes are necessary to overcome “emotional disturbance to the mind.” As the sutras start with the objective of “citta vritti nirodha” or calming the unruly mind, it is only appropriate we deal with possible vrittis (or, disturbances) arising out of emotional vacillations. These vrittis are accumulated over many births that we undergo and hence the disturbances are deep grained and need complete eradication. Asanas make the body supple and strong and provide health and healing creating a sturdy platform for inner yogic practices. Pranayama facilitates pranic currents to flow unhindered to all cells of the body, and pratyahara draws the senses inward, making the first step in meditation possible.

It is possible for oneself to observe the transformation that one’s mind undergoes as one progress in the limbs of Yoga. It is also possible to realize that between two thoughts, there exists a moment of stillness of the mind; this stillness could be expanded in time and the mind now is totally calm during this period. Further, keeping an object in focus, all its gunas could be grasped so that a complete characterization of the object’s true nature could be obtained. In the next level, the seed of Sabija Samadhi is replaced with seedless Samadhi. For the uninitiated, this could be confused with the state of deep sleep; however, in this Samadhi, the yogi is in complete control of the thoughtless state. He/she could expand this state as he/she chooses.

Kaivalya

It is necessary to understand evolution and the changes going around us as well as within us in terms of Yoga philosophy. Such understanding could provide us a proper method for attaining freedom. It is said that coming together of Purusha and Prakruti (nature, in its original form) constitutes bondage; the reason for this is also given; this is for providing experience to Purusha and to enable its evolution.

Two kleshas or disturbances, namely avidya and asmita, are the basic reason for bondage; involution of Purusha with nature is the root cause of these problems and separation of Purusha from Prakruti is the solution. This also defines real freedom discussed in the sutras. Avidya is ignorance (of the nature of reality) and asmita is identifying Buddhi with Purusha. Controlling the wandering mind and providing an inner focus to it through intense practice and vairagya or complete detachment from entangling in the matters of the world are two requirements for progress. Entering the Yogic path with dispassion, the practitioner follows the inner light of wisdom until he/she is in the direct light of Purusha culminating in complete freedom from all the external influences and disturbances.

The natural state of Purusha is reached when it is isolated from Prakruti; separating buddhi is the final act in achieving this state. In this freedom, Purusha could still be in the realm of Prakruti, but unaffected by it. Gunas that are product of Prakruti no longer have any role to play in such a person. He/she is beyond gunas and the gunas revert back to their origin, namely Prakruti, having fulfilled its role in such a person. As one author says “Kaivalya is a state which is reached when the supreme consciousness is established in its own self, when it is unrelated to and unconcerned with Buddhi, and remains all alone for all time.”

Conclusion

This then is the ultimate freedom for a practicing Yogi and as Bhagavad Gita says, for such a person, nothing more is needed for transcendence.

Siddhis that Yoga sutras present are the result of intense tapas (austerities) and are not conducive to higher levels of Samadhi. If one wants to realize the ultimate truth, then siddhis should be bypassed. They are just sign posts to tell the practitioner that all is well with the practices! As the practice progresses, four stages of consciousness are identified related to four koshas of the person; each being more subtle than the one earlier. The consciousness gets more focused as it where. We could think of an analogy; as the aperture in a camera gets smaller, a sharper focus is possible; similarly, as consciousness penetrates koshas starting from manomaya kosha, going inward, the focus of consciousness also gets sharper. This is where words fail and experience of “closing in” on reality surpasses all mental phenomena since we are in the realms beyond the mind. May all reposs in the eternal freedom that Yoga presents us.

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