

Beyond Ānanda

Īśvara in the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and Yoga Sūtras

1. All this is the syllable “Om”. The further explanation of it (is) “the past, the present, the future” – all is just Om. And whatever else is beyond the three times – that also is just Om.
2. All this is indeed Brahman. This Self is Brahman. That which is this Self has four quarters.

- Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad

This article is about a very practical yoga, the sole purpose of which is to get us beyond the daily grind of the waking, dreaming and bliss states. We may think that we live for bliss, but actually it's part of our daily routine. We're just sound asleep while it's going on. An amazing perspective of this idea is crystallized for us in two important texts, the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and the Yoga Sūtras. In that context, we'll explore a remarkable overlapping of meaning of the word Īśvara – especially relevant to OM – one that is crucial to understanding an ancient technique for remaining awake through all states of consciousness.

In the Yoga Sūtras there is a dramatic buildup to the presentation of Īśvara, beginning with Sūtra 1.17 which describes the full range of forms to be known (samprajñāta) by meditation - prior to a state which transcends form (anya - the other 1.18). The term samprajñāta is descriptive of nirodha, the essential definition of yoga in sūtra 1.2. In this context nirodha is the arresting of one form appearing in one's citta or field of awareness in favor of something finer or subtler.

Sūtra 1.17 describes the continuum of samprajñāta-nirodha as a progression:

1. vitarka - describing the physical world perceived by the senses / or gross - sthūla.
2. vicāra - describing what is beyond normal physical perception / inner or subtle - sūkṣma.
3. bliss - ānanda.

The 4th item mentioned here is asmitā, sense of 'I am', the basic identity which keeps an individual perpetually related to the world of form.

A nearly identical progression is described in the Māṇḍūkya as:

1. jāgarita-sthāna - the waking state which is sthūla-bhuk, experiencing the physical / gross.
2. svapna-sthāna - the dream state which is pravivikta (sūkṣma)-bhuk, experiencing the inner / subtle.
3. suṣupta-sthāna - the deep sleep which is among other descriptions ānanda-maya and ānanda-bhuk, consisting of bliss and experiencing bliss.

If we interlace the meaning of these two texts - reaching the 'anya-other' amounts to consciously penetrating the subtle, the equivalent of the dream state and experiencing bliss, the equivalent of the deep sleep state.

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad describes four quarters of ātman - self. The fourth like 'the other' in the Yoga Sūtras transcends the 'form' represented by the other three, in both cases including 1) physical 2) subtle and 3) bliss. The normal pattern of a 'self' is the continuous loop of these three day after day, year after year - awake to the physical and asleep to the dream and deep sleep, unaware that a fourth part of one's self exists. This is the deepest and most persistent habit of any self.

The primary purpose of yoga is to break this cycle - by a meditation practice that establishes conscious awareness first in the dream and then the deep sleep state.

Patanjali has outlined a process for doing this in his Bhūta-jaya sanyama or Mastery of the Elements meditation, which includes a focus on and the method for a transition from the physical to the subtle and beyond. This is followed by Indriya-jaya, Mastery of the Senses, a sanyama that builds on the Bhūta-jaya and provides the practice and the direct focus on asmitā, I-am-ness, the fourth item in Patanjali's list ^{1.17} required to break the cycle. In these two models, bliss is no guarantee of freedom. In fact it's bliss that keeps creation going. The bliss of the deepest sleep state is the unconscious root of the deepest urges for reproduction, hence creation. The classical image of this is the great universal being Viṣṇu, floating on his back in a sea of bliss nectar, while growing from his navel is a lotus on which sits Brahmā, the creator. Bliss, left to its own devices brings about creation and restores individuality in that creation. When bliss becomes an end in itself, it reestablishes this cycle.

Only when bliss is used as a means or as a transition to the fourth or 'other' can the cycle be broken. Symbolically there is the corresponding image of Śiva, ever upright, his meditation transcending the three states. The symbol here is the establishing of a meditation practice, in which one doesn't take bliss lying down. The actual transition from bliss to the fourth, Turīya is implied in the description of suṣupta, deep sleep in the Māndūkya Upaniṣad. It can only be so for one who is awake in the deep sleep state rather than waking up after it's over.

5. In which the sleeping (person) does not desire any desire, does not see any dream, that is suṣupta - deep sleep.

The suṣupta state, unified as an unidentified mass of cognition, consisting of bliss, enjoying bliss, serving as the mouth to consciousness is Prāñña, the third pāda.

6. This is the Lord of all Sarva-Īśvara. This is the knower of all. This is the inner controller. This is the source of all, indeed the origin and dissolution of beings.

Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad

The bliss of the deep sleep third can be either the beginning of beings or the dissolution of beings. It can be the mouth to consciousness, through slipping into dream or desiring a continuation of bliss by association with something within creation; or it can continue on as a transition to the fourth - where the meditator now alert even in what is normally the deep sleep state “does not desire any desire, does not see any dream”. This is also where the relevance of Īśvara is introduced in the Māṇḍūkya - here as Sarva-Īśvaraḥ - the lord of all - also described as Sarva-jñāḥ - the knower of all, and Antaryāmī - the inner controller and yoniḥ the source or the womb of all beings (or Brahman), the domain of Īśvara.

Here the definitions of Īśvara in the Yoga Sūtras are not only helpful but essential. Īśvara is defined in the following 1st chapter sūtras:

23 Or, because of Īśvara-praṇidhāna - (there is a difference in nearness of the anya-the other ^{1.18} i.e. it may be extremely near ^{1.22})

24 Īśvara is a distinction of puruṣa-self, untouched by kleśa-root obstructions (causes of pain), karma-action, fruition (of karma) and the accumulation (of karma).

25 There (in Īśvara), the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed.

26 That (Īśvara), being unlimited by time, is also the teacher of the ancients.

27 The expression of that (Īśvara) is OM (praṇava- ‘ever new’ / ‘ever praising’ - also the primary sound frequency of creation first meditated on as an inner ringing sound, as occurs when putting the fingers in the ears.)

Yoga Sūtra

Patanjali, in sūtras 20-22 and elsewhere, describes access to the ‘other’ by other means. Particularly relevant here are 21 and 22. Sūtra 21 states that the ‘other’ is near or to those who sustain an intense frequency. This could easily be

reinterpreted as “those who can tolerate intense bliss”. Sūtra 22 goes even further in saying that this intense frequency, or bliss, can be further distinguished by degrees of mild, moderate and extreme, which implies the ‘other’ is near or even nearer or immediately immanent. But he upstages this dramatic description in the very next sūtra “Or – because of Īśvara-praṇidhāna (the other is near, or even nearer or immediately immanent). There is an easier way, one which is not based on continual acceleration but a complete shift in identity which makes acceleration, which occurs in time and space, irrelevant. While Īśvara is fully defined in sūtras 24-27 -a precise definition of Īśvara-praṇidhāna evolves when all the definitions are linked together:

²⁴ Īśvara is a distinction of puruṣa-self:

who is untouched by kleśa-root obstructions (causes of pain), karma-action, fruition (of karma) and the accumulation (of karma); ²⁵ in whom the seed of omniscience is unsurpassed; ²⁶ who being unlimited by time, is also the teacher of the ancients; ²⁷ whose expression is OM.

Now if we combine this with the definition of OM from the Māṇḍūkya –

1. All this is the syllable “OM”; the further explanation of it (is) “the past, the present, the future” – all is just OM. And whatever else is beyond the three times – that also is just OM.

Īśvara, as a distinction of one’s self ^{1.24}, offers a perspective that is free from:

- kleśa i.e. an individual (asmitā) operating out of an ignorance (avidyā)^{2.5} that describes as attractive (rāga) that which is likely to prove painful, and unconsciously dictates aversion (dveṣa) to anything that has previously caused pain ^{YS 2.5-9}
- karma, the actions resulting from kleśa
- the resulting conditions of those actions (vipāka)
- a location (the citta-animated body) where all this occurs (āśaya)

Īśvara-praṇidhāna is the complete and absolute transfer of identity from a self

governed by kleśa, to Īśvara. It is achieved by making active the distinction of one's self which is Īśvara, and deactivating all other definitions of self. The means of achieving this transfer is OM, the "speech" of Īśvara. Since Īśvara is a distinction of self, unaffected by kleśa etc, the solution is to replace the individual's description of self, generated by kleśa with the singular expression of Īśvara - OM! The individual's description of self, based on avidyā-ignorance, the foundation of all kleśa is precisely described in Yogā Sūtra 2.5: Avidyā-ignorance is the "describing (khyāti)" of permanence, purity, happiness and self in reference to what is impermanent, impure, painful and not self.

The effective time logically for making this change of description and hence transfer of identity is one where the habitual self description is most subdued. The most detailed and explicit sanyama practice that Patanjali offers for getting to this step are the Bhūta-jaya and the Indriya-jaya practices. The Bhūta-jaya or element practice, guides one's awareness in calculated increments from full physical consciousness to a sense of ākāśa-space, the fifth element in this system. Here the svarūpa, or essential nature of ākāśa is śabda-sound. This is the perfect time to direct focus to OM, heard within inner space as a continuous uninterrupted ringing sound, as when one places one's fingers in the ears. This is also known as nāda.

The preparation for the step of complete transfer to OM as the only description of self, is clearly outlined in the Bhūta-jaya sanyama by the categories of vitarka, the descriptive language that captures the physical and vicāra, the descriptive language which captures the subtle. This part of the practice (illustrated at the end of this article) depends on the detailed use of language - word, meaning, knowledge and conceptualization, that describes a single element e.g. the water element (then air and space) in the body and brings citta to rest there to seemingly take the form of that which has been so thoroughly described. Citta becomes as if absorbed in a watery field. This samāpatti or

samādhi is called sa-vitarkā^{1.42} - ‘with descriptive language’. Once this is established in a continuous stream, and one is just absorbed in feeling the watery field and its natural rhythm including that of the breath and the heart, the next stage - ‘nir-vitarkā’^{1.43} - ‘without descriptive language’ depends on the giving up of language – language being unnecessary to sustain the stream since it has been established as an ongoing pattern for citta.

The progression from savitarka-description to nirvitarka-without description can proceed in stages e.g. the combined rhythm of the breath could first be described as the contraction and expansion of the watery field, felt internally like the rushing and receding of water on the shore of a peaceful bay, or the expansion and contraction of a jelly-fish, or any life form – the movement of life – just movement – just sensation. This in addition to being preparation for transfer to the OM of Īśvara, also constitutes the essence of nirodha, the very definition of yoga, the removal of identity from active state of citta^{1.2-3}, the individual field. This release of description, hence effort, makes possible an even more relaxed flow, a slowing down, and increased sensitivity to a subtler sense of inner space.

The next stages are sa-vicārā and nir-vicārā, which utilize the same prefixes sa- and nir- before vicārā - what is descriptive of the subtle. Once again the practice depends on the application of language to create a samādhi where citta takes the form of the subtle, or the spacious undifferentiated dimensions beyond the physical elements. Once this is established in a slower and deeper, more oceanic rhythm, language is dropped in favor of an abstract experience with no individualized reference points. All this is practice for abandoning the conventional expression of the individual, one which assesses the value of experience in relation to one thing after another, and places it in the context of present, past and future. In adopting the expression of Īśvara as one’s own, the only description of all that is one’s life and experience through the senses - gross, subtle and bliss - is OM. In the Māṇḍūkya, the gross or

waking state is A; the subtle or dream state is U; and the deep sleep bliss is M. All three are encompassed by OM. “The past, present and future are OM. And whatever is beyond the three states is also OM”.

Īśvara, as a distinction of one’s self, offers a perspective which is free from any single location, where the seed of omniscience (the individual field-citta) is expanded to an unsurpassed degree.^{1,25} From the perspective of Īśvara, the individual is nothing but OM - “All this is the syllable “Om” - no different from any other life field - all being equally OM. In practice the manifestation of Īśvara’s expression of OM is the unique nāda heard at the location of a spacious individual field. In making the conscious transfer from individualized language to OM, the actual physical structure of OM in the palate lays the foundation. All words, the building blocks of language, are combinations of sounds that occur within the range of the first sound A in the back of the palate (guttural) and the last sound M at the lips. If you simply open your mouth and vocalize without any particular effort, a first sound A will emerge. If you vocalize and close the lips - M. The sound O is a combination of A and U which is also located at the lips. Pronouncing O is like flat lining in one forceful sound the space between the very back of the palate where language begins and the lips.

OM in a word encompasses all other words. In making the substitution from all language to a single word, it’s helpful to know this and it is helpful to have chanted OM, the ultimate mantra. . . . *to be continued.*

Bhūta-Jaya Sanyama

Master of the Elements Meditation

3.44 By sanyama on (their) ¹sthūlā - gross state, ² svarūpa-essential nature, ³ sūkṣma -subtle state, ⁴ anvaya-effect (of transforming citta) and ⁵ arthavattva their existing for a purpose (for the seer) - mastery of the bhūta-elements.

- Yoga Sūtras

Bhūta-jaya offers a structure for delineating and navigating the subtle stages of meditation progressing from an ordinary waking consciousness through what would be the equivalent of dream states and deep sleep, without the loss of consciousness. Just like a map providing security that one can reach one's destination, although it's a previously unknown location, it is the structure of the sanyama that makes it possible to venture into previously unknown inner territories.

Without the focus that a structure like that of the bhūta-jaya sanyama, the mastery of the elements, one's identity tends to default to a seemingly solid form consisting of the elements. Both modern physics and ancient sacred teachings describe physical matter as merely an appearance, and in reality a constantly changing field. From Patanjali's perspective it is a starting point, whereby the elements one by one can be experienced with single focus effortlessly created by a detailed description of the prominent characteristics, svarūpa, of each respective element and thereby become doorways to a progressively subtler experience.

One begins within the body itself consisting of skeleton, tissue, water, air, electricity etc. Within the structure of each of these, there is a further progression from physical or sthūla, what can be known by the senses, to the subtle, sūkṣma, where one discovers within each element a spaciousness, a sense of space, inner space. Through the element air and the vehicle of the breath, inner space can be blended with surrounding space.

The first of the five sanyamas in the bhūta-jaya is 1. sthūla - the physical or gross element e.g. water. In this practice, citta is assigned to the location of water in the body which is abundant everywhere except in the skeleton. This means feeling the omnipresence of water in the body, in all soft tissues, the circulatory system, the organs, the skin etc. This sanyama gives a new definition to one's life and existence as an entirely internally experienced "water field".

The second of the five sanyamas absorbs consciousness exclusively in the water field: 2. svarūpa, the essential nature, the unique identifying characteristics of the element. In practice it completes the first - sthūla by flooding citta with language and imagery that describes internally the feeling of water. Starting with the actual feeling of wetness in the mouth, and by description extending the feeling of lubrication to every soft tissue in the body right down to those little watery sacks, the very cells.

The richer the language the deeper the absorption. This can include everything from wet to plump, juicy and succulent. It also can include inference - anumāna, something that Patanjali implies is in full use up to the very final stages of yoga meditation. While we can feel wetness in the mouth or throat, we're not really sensitive to the wetness everywhere, until something like the lips or skin becomes dry and uncomfortable. Whatever internal comfort there is due to the fact that it's wet. If there were no moisture left, no feeling would be possible as in the case of a mummy.

When this practice is combined with refinements of the terms vitarka (describing sthūla - the physical or gross) and vicāra (describing sūkṣma - the subtle) in sūtras 1.42-44, a pathway is laid from gross to subtle leading up to the 'other'. These steps begin with the immediate full awareness of the physical body and proceed in manageable increments of describing and experiencing the physical (vitarka) in a such a way that it becomes a bridge to a parallel description and experience of the subtle (vicāra).